

## Your Soul and Mine

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## Your Soul and Mine

by [BlindCupid](#)

### Summary

James Potter's life is perfect. He's handsome and wealthy and has great friends and he knows that Lily Evans will be his wife one day. He has everything figured out and everything is perfect. Why should any of that change? Why should these new confusing feelings he has whenever Severina Snape is around, change anything?

Meanwhile, Severina is sure her crush on Potter will fade with time. It's not like anything could come of it.

COMPLETED



## Chapter 1



James's chest ached with the most intoxicating desire he had ever felt. The emotion was so intense and so pure, it could only have come from the deepest part of himself, his magical core, his soul. The feeling spurred him into a gallop. He felt strong and powerful, energy rippling through his legs, his hooves pounding against the forest floor—kicking up grass, leaves, and dirt as he sprinted ever forward and deeper into the woods. He darted passed trees and brush, leaped over fallen branches, and ducked under the hanging foliage.

He reached a small clearing and stopped.

Where it looked as dark as night in the woods, here in the clearing it was bright and clear, sweetly flowered with the perfection of a spring day. His nostrils flared and his chest heaved. He smelled something that made his heart stop in his chest.

He stood frozen at the edge of the clearing as two deer emerged. The first boldly strode into the grassy clearing and began nibbling on the clover flowers. Her coat was healthy, sleek, and rich-auburn. Her scent was life and love, and all that spring hoped to promise. The second doe lingered in the shade, her ears twitched side to side and her eyes were watchful. She stepped carefully into the clearing. The sun revealed her in gentle rays through the leaves of the forest. Then ever-so-carefully, she stepped out fully. She was skittish and mangy. Her fur, dim and brittle, her skin stretched across her ribs like rippling waves of fur. A breeze caught her scent and carried it to him.

He felt the breeze pass through his fur but the coolness did nothing to calm the sudden flood of heat in his body at her scent. She smelled richly sweet, like longing and passion. Her scent sparked something unfamiliar— an unquenchable desire to find the deepest meaning of existence and pursue it wholeheartedly. His veins had been set aflame and he grunted aloud from the force of it.



Both deer perked up and looked straight at him.

He took a tentative step forward, coming into the light. At the sight of him, both deer tore away and ran in opposite directions. His pulse beat heavily in his throat and he felt the anticipation of the chase course through him— that thrill which was the stuff of life. His legs begged him to move and his heart begged him to sprint, but his head spun one way and then the other. Which doe to pursue?

Just as he meant run forward without much more thought than to let instinct guide him, his shoulder jarred by a push.

“James, mate, you slept through breakfast.”

James groaned, reached for his glasses, and sat up. The dream didn’t so much fade as completely vanish, replaced by the shock of reality.

“Bloody hell,” He grumbled, “Thanks Moony.”

Remus sat on his bed, holding out a napkin with some toast and jam to him, “It’s not a full English but it’s the best I could do.”

James scarfed down the toast in two bites, mumbling another ‘thanks Moony,’ and throwing on his clothes without care. When they reached the others, James and Sirius threw an arm each around the other and walked a little down the hall like that, with Remus and Peter at their sides.

“Prongs! You’re awake! Pity really. I had some really good ideas on how to get you up if Moony couldn’t.” Sirius laughed.

“Moony, I owe you extra chocolate next Hogsmead. Don’t let me forget.” James called over to Remus.

Sirius ruffled James’s hair and James punched him in the arm.

“Mate, last time you woke me, I got frostbite from the snowstorm you charmed over me.” James grumbled.

“It was a wicked charm! Some of my best work.” Sirius said proudly.

“Except you didn’t know how to reverse it and it followed him all day until Lily took pity on him and canceled the charm.” Moony added.

“Can we stop talking about this? I’m already sorry I brought it up.” James groaned.

“You were so cold you turned blue and when Evans came to your rescue, you blushed purple,” Sirius chuckled and pinched James’s cheek which James pushed aside forcefully before throwing Sirius into a headlock.

“Err, Evans.” Peter squeaked.

James snapped his head up and shoved Sirius away. Sirius laughed and straightened out his hair and clothes. The group had just reached the hall to Charms and sure enough, Lily Evans was standing just outside; the warm-morning light seeping through the castle windows, making her look like she was glowing with warmth.

His eyes didn’t linger, however, being drawn to the dark figure that stood immediately in front of her. Severina Snape stood, shoulders hunched forward slightly, clutching her school books



protectively to her chest. Her eyes cast down just a bit– her lank, greasy, black hair fell into her face. She pushed the strands behind her ear, revealing her pasty-pale skin and her hooked nose that seemed too large for her face.

James felt... strange, different– not bad, just not like anything he ever felt before. No, that wasn't true, but for the life of him, he couldn't remember when or where he had felt like this before. It was like the air he breathed gave him more breath than usual. It was comforting and intoxicating all at once.

“What's that snake doing here at this hour? We don't suddenly have Charms with Slytherin, do we? If so, I'm going back to bed.” Sirius grumbled.

Moony shrugged.

James's feet seemed to have developed a mind of their own and he found himself moving toward the two girls. Severina's black eyes snapped to his for a moment before Lily also looked up with her green eyes, bright as gems, to find him there.

Severina turned and walked away, her robes sweeping behind her like dark wings. Lily turned to the Charms classroom, her nose tilted to the sky.

James looked at his friends, “Did I do something recently to offend Evans, that I'm not aware of?”

Sirius shrugged. Peter looked lost and Remus spoke up with a tisk, “Well, it's just a guess but it might have something to do with you levitating Miss Snape into the Black Lake last week.”

Sirius shook his head and with a huff said, “Girls just can't take a joke.”



## Chapter 2

Severina Snape squinted at the parchment in front of her. She had gone to her and Lily's spot in the Library to salvage what she could of her water-damaged notes. Her inky scrawl was faded and blurred, the parchment wrinkled and she wondered if she should just give up trying to recover her notes at all. She had Lily's copies and Lily's were okay but Severina sorely missed her own notes. She had a spell written on the margin of her DADA notes that had come in a flash of inspiration during class but she couldn't now recall what it was.

She groaned and in a huff, threw her quill into the inkpot.

Potter.

If she were weaker she'd let her tears fall, but Severina gave up crying in public a long time ago.

She had been walking with Lily near the lake, revising for DADA, when her feet left the ground- it felt like she was falling toward the sky, gravity abandoning her. She cried out involuntarily, much to her shame. Strangely, the only thing she clearly remembered before truly falling and landing into the Black Lake with a splash, was Potter's laugh.

Severina looked at her ruined parchment with a sigh and grabbed her quill.

*I hate James Potter. I hate HIM.*

If I repeat it enough, will it make it true?

*I blame my mother, really. Maybe Eileen and Tobias's relationship has twisted something inside me. Maybe my mind links being treated like shit with love.*

Severina ran her fingers through her hair, propping up her head and hovering over the parchment.

*I hate how the air seems too thin whenever he walks into a room. Is it fear? It would make more sense if it was. Suspicion, trepidation- these would be more appropriate. Attraction, admiration- these are non-sensical! He never looks at me with anything other than disgust and repulsion. I tell myself that I don't care. I tell myself I'm above schoolgirl crushes and convince myself that it is temporary. I'll grow out of this. It's not like anything could ever come of it anyway.*

*Besides, Lily likes him and he likes her. It's only a matter of time. Well, Lily hasn't told me that she likes him, which hurts. It's obvious she does, though. It would be hypocritical of me to hold it against her. Still, I feel like Lily could do better.*

*It's not like I meant to fancy him. I would much rather not.*

*If I could, I would tell my heart not to flutter whenever I see his stupid smile, or hear his annoying voice, or smell his disgusting cologne. I'd tell my cheeks not to flush when his eyes meet mine.*

*There are moments, not of kindness or sentiment but moments, when our eyes meet and the world around us falls away. Moments when he doesn't hear those talking to him or see the movements of others around him and I'm the only one he sees. In those moments, time stills and I feel like I can't breathe.*



*Pregnant moments of anticipation for something; something I can't understand, but there IS something and I'm not imagining it. This something about James Potter that I'm drawn to- no doubt like a moth is drawn to an open flame, only to find itself burnt to a crisp if it gets too close.*

*I hate James Potter. I hate him and more than anything, I hate that I love him. I love him without reason, without hope, without expectation, and one day I wish with all my heart that this love will fade. I hope I look back and laugh at how silly I was as a girl with a crush on her school-yard-bully and her best friend's boyfriend (maybe husband by then, though hopefully, Lily won't end up one of those girls who marries her school-sweetheart and pops out a kid before she's 20).*

*As for me, for now, I'll content myself with focusing instead on my studies. Lucius said if I do well on my OWLs, he'll talk to his father about a possible sponsorship. So, I've got that going for me.*

With that, Severina ran out of parchment. She let out a self-deprecating chuckle, rolled her eyes and turned to her studies.



## Chapter 3

James wasn't entirely sure what brought him to the library.

Remus announced that he was heading there to study, "If any of you lot, would like to come along," not actually expecting anyone to take him up on his offer.

Sirius and Peter mumbled that he should, "have fun with that," and went back to their game of Exploding Snap.

James said, however, "I'll come with you."

Remus blinked at him a couple of times before he smiled and responded with genuine pleasure to have a companion. Once in the library, James was surprised at how nearly every seat in the place was filled. The OWLs and NEWTs were still a couple of months away and the number of fifth and seventh years in one place surprised him. Remus shuffled his feet a bit and turned to James,

"I know where there might be a couple of free seats," he paused and looked James hard in the eyes, 'but you have to promise to be on your best behavior."

James frowned, "Of course."

Remus still hesitated before setting off to a far nook-like corner of the library.

Tucked away was a little table that sat four but only one seat was occupied. He knew immediately who it was. James felt sure he'd know her anywhere and he doubted he would ever lose that ability to pick her out of a crowd or a darkened corner. It was an uncomfortable feeling, at times, to be so entirely aware of her presence. Like he could never escape her, nor her, him.

It was the same with Lily except Lily didn't try to hide. Lily never really ran from him in earnest. Lily wasn't trying to escape him. It was just a chase, a game. Snape, though... Well, he didn't really know, he couldn't say he's ever thought of her like that. But for some reason, today, he couldn't escape the realization that he was drawn to her.

Remus approached her and she looked up at him unfazed, like seeing him there was a natural occurrence. She tucked her hair behind her ear and the corner of her lip twitched up in a fleeting smile. James's body reacted involuntarily, his hands gripped into fists, his jaw flexed and his nostrils flared. A building heat coursed through him and he stepped forward.

Her eyes snapped to his, wide and doe-like. He never noticed that before, how like a doe's her eyes were- so dark they were almost black, framed by dark lashes, open and alert. He froze in her gaze. His body began to relax steadily like he was melting.

"Hey, Severina, umm," Remus scratched at the back of his neck, 'do you mind if we sit here? All the other seats are taken."

She sighed heavily from her nose and said, "Fine," shaking her head and gathering her things. She was getting up to leave, James realized.

"You don't have to leave," James said in a voice that was almost distressed.

Remus added quickly, "Right. I meant, to say: do you mind if we join you? It's just the two of us. Sirius and Peter remained in the dorms."



Severina looked between them for a moment with narrowed eyes, “Lily isn’t coming. She’s studying Divination with her dorm mates today.”

“We’re just here to study.” Remus insisted but looked over at James as if expecting him to leave, knowing that there wasn’t much hope of running into Lily here. James only nodded and took the seat across from Snape.

She hesitated.

James held up his hands, palms up, “I’ll be on my best behavior, I promise,” and he smiled without malice.

Severina sighed and nodded, “fine,” before she reopened her books.

Her body was still tense and her eyes were on the text in front of her. Remus passed James some notes which James half-heartedly reviewed. Snape didn’t look at him, in fact, she seemed to be avoiding looking at him. James, on the other hand, glanced up at her almost every other second.

After several minutes, she started to relax. She shifted a little, turned the page in her book, tucked her bottom lip between her teeth, and proceeded to chew on it in thought. It wasn’t a particularly attractive look on her, but it was such a natural, normal thing to do. James wondered at her being comfortable enough, with him sitting across from her, to do something so mundane as to chew her lip while she studied. That thought had him melting again; he felt like his insides had turned to goo. He could have chuckled but he didn’t want to disturb her.

James didn’t understand what had gotten into him, but he wanted more. He felt an overwhelming need to be closer, to touch her.

He shifted in his seat, looked intently at the notes in front of him, and turned the parchment over. It was just for show; he hadn’t read any of it and didn’t intend to. His mind was focused intently on stretching out his leg. He kept his face as emotionless as he could and brushed the side of his leg against hers. He heard her soft gasp and felt the heat of her leg on his. She shifted and pulled her leg away, tucking it under her chair.

The brief touch was enough to send a surge of hypersensitivity through his body. His throat tightened and his chest ached with want. He felt like he was going crazy. His brain shouted at him- *What are you doing? What has gotten into you?* All the while, his body ached with want and begged to get closer.

James nearly jumped when Remus elbowed him and asked if he was done with the notes. James nodded and traded notes. He ran his fingers through his hair, fluffing his already messy locks. He glanced up at Severina and caught her looking at him. She looked away immediately and, for some reason, it brought a smile to his lips that he could feel through his cheeks.

He was still staring at her when she glanced up again. It just for a moment at first but she did a double-take when she realized he was staring at her. Her face flushed- not just her cheeks, her whole face turned pink.

Her eyes were entrancing. It wasn’t the first time he noticed but it was the first time he considered giving in and simply letting himself fall into those black pools. So he did; he fell and for a fleeting glimpse he was out of his body and standing next to the table. Except Severina sat alone tucking away a wrinkled and warped piece of parchment with fresh ink, under her pile of notes.

“Severina, do you happen to have your DADA notes with you?”



Remus's voice ripped James back into his present body. James felt disoriented and his head tingled but Severina and Remus didn't seem to have noticed anything amiss.

"I have Lily's." She said and started gathering them to hand to Remus. Under the notes, James caught a glimpse of that same parchment from the vision, the corner peeking out.

"Oh. No, that's okay then." Remus said, waving off the notes.

Severina arched an eyebrow at him with a subtle smirk. Remus smiled in return, snorting a little through his nose. This made James shift up in his seat and angle himself to look at the both of them.

"What's wrong with Lily's notes?" James asked, taking the notes and not once looking at them but rather keeping his eyes on Remus and Severina.

Severina answered, "Nothing," and pulled out her Transfiguration text.

Remus turned to James placating, "Lily's notes are perfectly fine. I was only asking Severina for hers because she takes more detailed notes." Remus's eyes darted toward Snape with a smirk playing on his lips, 'Not always legible but definitely detailed.'

Severina just huffed, shrugged and went back to her notes, but her face had softened, especially around the eyes and her mouth didn't settle into its more severe norm. Remus seemed unfazed by the subtle change he had made in Snape's demeanor.

"Why don't you have your notes? If they are so much better?" James asked.

Her eyes snapped to him and her expression turned hard and angry, "Someone thought it'd be funny to drown me in the Black Lake while I was holding them."

James felt the coldness of her accusation bodily. She might as well have just dropped *him* into the Black Lake, in the middle of winter. He imagined himself crashing through a layer of ice before being surrounded by the inky-black waters.

He was not cowed, though, "You were fine. The squid pulled you out," James said dismissively.

Severina's face pinched in anger and frustration and James thought she looked in pain. He didn't really understand. It was just a joke. He wouldn't have let her drown and she was able to get notes from Lily, so no real harm done. Right?

She shook her head silently and James felt even more confusion mixed with inexplicable guilt. Why was she making him feel bad about this? He and his friends pranked everyone. It was what they did. They were the comic relief of Hogwarts! They never really hurt anyone... permanently.

Sure, Snape was the most fun to prank. Her face would turn crimson and her eyes would brighten and she always gave as good as she got. When she was really angry, her voice took on a rich velvety quality and she'd sound so... so... dangerous. Without fail, it always sent a shiver up his spine, every time.

Even the day at the lake, once the squid plopped her back on land, she wasted no time sending a jelly-leg hex at him. He had been laughing and before he knew it, his legs gave out and he landed on his ass, the wind knocked out of his lungs. Before he even caught his breath, she was standing over him with her wand in his face. He laid flat on his back, gasping and looking up at her- the afternoon sun, haloed around her. She was soaking wet, her shirt translucent, and stuck to her skin. Lake-water dripped onto his face from her hair. Her furry made her eyes shine and her chest heave.



That was all he could really remember, watching her small breasts press and heave against her wet blouse.

Severina gathered her books from the small table in the library. Her head and shoulders drooped and her hair hid her face. James felt panicked and confused. Why did she keep trying to leave? What did he do wrong? Before she could reach for the rest of her parchments, James snatched them away.

Her eyes snapped to his, wide with surprise and James thought he saw fear flash in her eyes. That flash of fear stirred uncomfortably in his gut. Then he remembered the wrinkled parchment and stood abruptly to sift through the parchments,

“I’m sure not all your notes were ruined...” he said.

He did find some water-damaged parchment with faded and illegible splotches of ink that must have once been her own writings. James felt guilt choke his throat but he pressed on. Severina jumped up and tried to grab her parchment back. He handed her some but held the ones he hadn’t look through yet, over their heads so she couldn’t reach. Remus stood too and was trying to mediate,

“James, just give Severina back her notes. We are going to get ourselves kicked out.”

“Potter, those are mine. Give them back!” Severina hissed, hushed and frantic.

*What was she hiding? She wouldn’t be reacting this way if she wasn’t hiding something*, James reasoned as he finally found the parchment he was looking for. It was wrinkled and warped like the others but it had fresh writing all over it. Severina tried jumping to grab it out of his hand but James jerked it away. He saw his name! It was about him!

Severina grew even more frantic in her attempts to retrieve the parchment. From the angle James held it, he didn’t start reading from the top of the page but further down. He saw his name and read, *I hate James Potter. I hate him and more than anything, I hate that I love him.*

His heart raced and his mind froze. *She hates me? She hates that she loves me? She loves me? She loves me!*

James’s eyes turned to look at Severina and she knew he had read enough to know the gist of what she wrote. She froze in fear and defeat, her voice wobbled,

“Give it back.”

James only stared at her at first but slowly shook his head, no.

“James,” Remus said in warning.

Severina looked on the verge of tears and swiftly turned to the rest of her stuff, gathered her books to her chest, and ran from him. Remus shoved James in the chest.

“James, what’s wrong with you?”

James dropped the parchment to his side but held it tight and just blinked at his friend.

“You were acting weird the entire time we were here! I know you think Snape is... strange and you don’t like Slytherins, but if you gave her a chance, you’d find that Severina is actually kind of nice when she has a mind to be. She’s also smart and her dry-wit can be funny at times. You know Lily



might actually consider going out with you if you were nice to her friend? You had a chance just now, James. I hope you realize that.”

Remus’s little lecture had the opposite effect than he intended. His words made it to James but his point passed entirely over James’s head.

“What? Do you fancy Snape, Moony?”

“What? No! You do realize that you can be friends with a girl without fancying her?”

“Oh, and you and Snivelina are friends?”

“I don’t know. Maybe? Does it matter?”

“Yes of course it matters...”

“Why? Because she’s a Slytherin?”

“Yes!” James answered and for some reason he felt like he was dying.

Severina was the enemy. She was a Slytherin.

James recalled his mother and father talking about the war that was coming. They warned him about a dark wizard whose name could not be spoken aloud and the army he was building of dark wizards and witches.

War was coming.

Everyone knew that Slytherins leaned towards dark magic. Snape was a dark witch. She had even used dark spells on him and the Marauders before. She would join that dark wizard, whose name his parents would not speak and she... she would be lost to him.

James hung his head and felt like weeping. His mind was spinning and his heart hurt and he didn’t understand! Why was he so confused?

He looked down at the parchment in his hand. *I love him without reason, without hope, without expectation, and one day I wish with all my heart that this love will fade.*

Remus’s words echoed in his conscience, *You had a chance just now James, I hope you realize that.*



## Chapter 4

Severina made it to her room before she broke down in tears. She was mortified and she agonized over how Potter might abuse his discovery.

No doubt he would tell his friends. She imagined their laughter and sneers. She imagined his handsome face twisted in cruel humor while he mocked her.

She was so ashamed of herself. Embarrassed that she even thought he might have been flirting with her in the library. Of course, Jame Potter wouldn't flirt with her! She'd been so stupid to think he had been staring at her for any other reason than to find fault in her.

He hadn't meant to brush his leg against hers under the table. He hadn't meant for his hazel-eyes to look so soft and inviting as he stared into hers. She must have only imagined it. He must not have smiled when she blushed, for any other reason than he was laughing at her.

Severina curled in on herself and cried until fatigue slowed her tears and softened her whimpers. Sleep welcomed her with comforting arms.

That night, Severina dreamt a dream she would not remember in the light of day. If she could remember, maybe she would have thought on it and wondered if it had some secret meaning or insight to her life and to the decisions she'd be forced to make, while she was yet too young to make them.

She dreamt that she was running through the woods. She wore nothing but a thin white slip, her figure silhouetted through the fabric. Her feet were bare and dirty but unfazed by the rough ground that she tread. She ran as agile as a deer, bounding through the thick forest. She never tired as she continued to run steadily down untrodden paths, neither did she slow.

The warm glow of morning light warmed the dew of the forest. The woods were alive with wisps of steam. The sun's light broke and dispersed through the trees, making rows of translucent, silvery glow. She ran through it in ecstasy. Rays of light flickered as she passed through sun and shadow. She, the only movement in that life-filled forest.

In the horizon, to which she ran parallel, she saw the silhouette of a young stag. He stood tall and imposing upon a hill, far from the direction in which she was running. She did not stop her own path but she admired his beauty from afar. How well suited he looked, standing watchful over the woods. His antlers branching out like a crown, like a symbol of his regency over the forest.

The stag watched her with careful eyes and just as she nearly passed him by, he reared up and started towards her in a gallop. He was beautiful, strong, and confident in his strides. When he caught up with her, he turned with her and ran alongside her. She looked over and laughed with joy- free and flying. They ran together for some time, simply thrilled with their own little race until the stag let out a great grunt and stopped abruptly, cutting off their trajectory.

He blocked her bodily and his hazel-eyes seemed to warn and beg her all at once. She didn't understand but she reached out her hand and stroked his velvety nose. She looked passed him and saw a darkened path, black as pitch. She could not see where it lead but a cold breeze blew from it, chilling her. She shivered.

The stag nudged her hand and made a whining noise in the back of his throat. She looked down at him and stroked his neck, running her fingers through his thick mane.



Another breeze, this time stronger, blew through her from the darkened path and in the breeze, a voice- a hissed whisper, "Severina." The voice filled her with terror and yet it tantalized. It entranced her and compelled her toward it.

The stag stomped his front hooves, shook his rack, snorted and grunted in desperation. She tried to calm him and move around him at the same time. They danced around each other, neither gaining any ground.

And that was how her dream ended. Not that she remembered.

Severina woke early for breakfast with an empty stomach, having missed dinner. She determined that she would avoid the Marauders as much as possible today. It hadn't been the first time she cried herself to sleep because of James Potter and she doubted it'd be the last.

It was for the best really. She needed to get over her crush and focus on her OWLs so she could make something of herself. If she was going to get a decent potions apprenticeship, she needed impressive marks and recommendations. If she could get a sponsor, then all the better. She didn't have time for a childish crush on a stupid boy who cared more about pranks and goofing off than about taking life seriously.

No, she wasn't going to be destroyed by this and she definitely wasn't going to starve over it.

She left early for breakfast, intending to be one of the first to arrive. So, it was no small surprise when she spotted Potter waiting by the stairs, alone. He looked up at her like he was expecting her and tucked a folded piece of parchment into his satchel. He adjusted the strap on his shoulder and cleared his throat,

"Uh, hi. Umm. Can we talk?"

Severina was too shocked to move at first and certainly not to reply. Potter must have taken her silence as a form of ascent, however, because he approached her with a charming smile. He stopped just in front of her, close enough to touch. She could almost feel the heat of his body. She definitely felt the heat in hers rising and she couldn't swallow the lump in her throat.

A bit flustered and annoyed that her body was betraying her, she answered with a bite of venom, "What are you playing at, Potter?"

"Nothing. I'm not.' He adjusted his glasses and ran his fingers through his hair- a nervous habit, 'I just wanted to, I don't know, maybe eat breakfast together? I have quidditch practice later, you could come watch.' His words were quick and stumbled. 'We could meet up to just hang out or study or whatever you want. It's a Hogsmead weekend. Would you like to go? With me? Together... a date? I mean, I guess what I'm getting at is... Severina, would you be my girlfriend?"

Somewhere in the middle of his ramblings, Severina thought she must still be in bed. She wondered if this was a dream. She never dreamt anything like this before. Why would she? It was folly to dream of something so impossible.

It was too good to be true.

That's why she didn't believe him. She didn't for a moment, even entertain the hope that he might be sincere.

She turned her eyes to the ground between them, squeezing her eyes shut and pressing a tear passed her lashes and letting it fall on her cheek. She shook her head from side to side in disbelief.



She spoke to the floor in a heartbroken-hush, “You’ve done and said a lot of horrible things to me over the years, Potter; but pretending you like me? Knowing how I feel about you and throwing it in my face like this? This is the cruelest thing you’ve ever done.’ Her voice cracked; a second tear joined the first and she begged him, ‘Just leave me alone.”

She walked passed him; kept her head down. She kept her head down all throughout breakfast. She kept her eyes off him throughout the classes they shared. More importantly, she kept her mind off of his words and the images they had conjured.



## Chapter 5

James was in agony. He read and reread Severina's parchment until he practically memorized it. He read it in class when he couldn't focus. He read it at night as he drifted off to sleep. The last thing he saw before his eyes closed was the blurring of her words and the first thing he saw when he woke was her words coming into focus.

It wasn't a love letter. It was more like a hate letter. She was rather mean to him throughout (and why did that make his stomach flutter?) Yet the raw honesty in it drove him to distraction.

He wanted more.

He wanted her.

He couldn't really describe it any other way that felt as accurate. Right or wrong. He just wanted more of her, all of her, wanted to be close to her, wanted to know everything about her.

What was it about her mum? Eileen and Tobias? They must be her parents? Does her dad treat her mom like shit?

*He treats her* like... shit? He didn't think he was that bad...

She was obviously confused.

The whole thing was riddled with contradictions. She hated him and she loved him?

She wrote about Lily marrying him as though it were a surety but didn't think he was good enough for Lily. That probably should have hurt more than it did. Honestly, he didn't know what to think of Lily anymore. He felt his own mental contradiction acutely.

Of course, he was going to marry Lily! He decided that the first time he met her. What was wrong with marrying your Hogwarts's sweetheart and starting a family while you were still young?

Now, he was questioning all his plans- all his expectations for life and love.

He loved Lily... Life with Lily would be happy, easy, full of laughter, and sunshine. She was perfect. They bickered like an old married couple already. They flirted and laughed and had fun together with her friends and his. His parents even loved Lily already.

Severina was the odd one out. Life would be easier if she wasn't in the picture or if she could just be more like Lily.

But now what? Now, holding her words in his hands, remembering her blushing cheeks and her dark eyes, he desperately wanted her. How could he rationalize this new feeling? How did it change anything?

Severina told him to leave her alone and he did. Lily had told him to leave her alone thousands of times and he never did. With Lily he never felt like she meant it; Severina, she meant it.

Maybe he had been a bit rash. He had thought about it the entire night before, not able to sleep until he decided that dating Snape would be the only way to get these feelings out of his system. He was prepared to deal with the looks, the whispers, and his friends' disapproval. It would've worked out for both of them; date for a while, realize it wasn't meant to be and then he could



marry Lily with a clean conscience. Sirius dated all the time. Why couldn't he?

Snape's rejection threw doubt in his plan. It should have ended right there but it only made everything so much more unbearable. Every day his longing grew. He couldn't look at her without feeling choked by the strength of his longing for her.

So he didn't look. The last time he did, he nearly cried out in frustration— not a frustration of anger but of desperation. He sat behind her and Lily in potions lab and he watched as she absentmindedly brushed her hair to the side, exposing her neck. He had nearly groaned aloud at the sight. The side of her neck sloped gracefully, exposing the expanse of soft milky-white skin and a single freckle that rested an inch below her ear. At that moment he would have given anything to be able to touch her, to feel that skin under his fingers, under his lips, to taste the smooth skin with the tip of his tongue.

Sirius elbowed him, "Focus, Prongs. You can ogle Lily at lunch."

So, James did; he flirted with Lily throughout lunch and didn't look across the Great Hall toward the Slytherin table, not once. Nope. He didn't look. He didn't notice her at all after that. Definitely didn't notice how she didn't look at him. Definitely didn't notice how instead of not looking at him, she was looking at Remus.

Okay, maybe he noticed her attention on his friend and maybe it made him feel... a little annoyed, confused, jealous.

Alright he was jealous! But it wasn't like he was going to be petty about it. It wasn't like he was taking it out on Remus. He just wasn't feeling up to frolicking in the woods with a werewolf tonight. So, James laid in his bed with Severina's parchment, alone in the dorm, while Padfoot and Wormtail took Moony duty.

Okay, maybe his jealousy was petty. He was confused and hurt. Severina rejected him. She hated him.

James lifted the worn-parchment to read her words again,

*If I could, I would tell my heart not to flutter whenever I see his stupid smile, or hear his annoying voice, or smell his disgusting cologne. I'd tell my cheeks not to flush when his eyes meet mine.*

*There are moments, not of kindness or sentiment but moments, when our eyes meet and the world around us falls away. Moments when he doesn't hear those talking to him or see the movements of others around him and I'm the only one he sees. In those moments, time stills and I feel like I can't breathe.*

*Pregnant moments of anticipation for something; something I can't understand, but there IS something and I'm not imagining it. This something about James Potter that I'm drawn to- no doubt like a moth is drawn to an open flame, only to find itself burnt to a crisp if it gets too close.*

*I hate James Potter. I hate him and more than anything, I hate that I love him. I love him without reason, without hope, without expectation, and one day I wish with all my heart that this love will fade.*

Had her feelings faded so quickly, while his feelings grew with rapidity?

The more he wanted her, the more that want, felt like a need. Ironically, the most surprising thing



about it all, was how unsurprising it felt; it felt as natural as breathing. James pressed the parchment to his chest and he felt the rise of his lungs and the beat of his heart through her written words.

He didn't want this to fade.

Despite the pain he felt, this something between them was real and raw and more passionate than anything he could have imagined happening to his heart. It was so much more than he thought himself capable of feeling. It made him want more from life. It made him want to be more- to become something more and better than people expected of him, more than he expected of himself.

James heard Sirius's voice and Peter's chuckle approach the dorm room. James sat up, confused that they were coming back so soon. He tucked the parchment beneath his pillow and looked out the window- the moon had only just started to rise. Moony was alone, he realized, and guilt twisted inside of him.

Sirius and Peter entered the room.

"What are you guys doing back? You're not staying with Moony tonight?"

"We would have but we were followed." Peter told him.

"Snivelina was sticking her big nose where it didn't belong." Sirius explained and threw himself on his bed grabbed a quidditch magazine and started flipping through it.

"Snape was following you?" James asked. He felt off-kilter. Something wasn't right.

"We didn't let on that we knew she was following us." Sirius started but Peter cut in excitedly,

"And Padfoot asked me how to get into the Whomping Willow and I didn't understand at first..."

"Honestly, Wormy, you were completely useless, but I was able to give that eavesdropper a reason to mind her own business."

James got to his feet and looked hard at his friend, "Wait... tell me you did *not* tell Snape how to get into the tunnel. What if she goes into the shack? Moony's in there! Are you insane?"

Sirius swallowed, "I mean... it's not like she'll... I just wanted to give her a bit of a scare. It's not like I really told her, she was listening in on our conversation. Besides, she may not go at all. Even if she does, she'll hear Moony howling and turn scared. I doubt she'll get as far as the shack."

James already grabbed his cloak, "I'll just go make sure."

"James, she's not going to go as far as the shack..."

But James was already gone. He walked quickly at first but every step felt too slow, so he ran. He ran all the way to the Whomping Willow. He barely dodged a swinging branch before he reached the knot to immobilized the tree. He stored away his cloak near the entrance and headed down the tunnel calling out softly,

"Snape? Snape, you in here?"

He waited for a reply but none came.

He called again, "Severina?" He tried Lily's nickname for her, 'Sev?'



Then James heard it, a blood-curdling scream and then another- Moony's pain and Severina's terror. James ran but his feet were too slow, so he shifted and his hooves carried him faster and faster through the tunnel. The door into the shack was open and the scene inside froze his veins.

Snape held up her wand and cast a dark curse at the werewolf charging toward her. The flash of magic struck the werewolf's shoulder and it shuddered to a halt. It wasn't stunned for long; it shook itself and snarled at her before lunging.

James was already charging forward, his head lowered. His antlers caught Moony in his side and flung the werewolf, like a rag doll, against the walls of the shack. The impact rattled the ceiling; dust and debris showered down on them. James spun his head to look at Severina who stared at him in disbelief and frozen in fear. He begged her with his eyes to *run!*

Moony howled as he righted himself and his eyes glowed dangerously. Ignoring the stag completely, he zeroed in on Severina. She raised her wand, eyes wide on the snarling werewolf, and willed her feet to move toward the entrance to the tunnel. James put himself between her and the werewolf.

He braced himself, ready to fling the werewolf away again, but the wolf dodged him just enough to slam into his side, knocking James off balance. Before James could recover, he was shoved again until he, himself was sent crashing against the wall. More dust and debris fell, clouding around him. Through the dust and the pain in his lungs, he saw a flash of magic and heard a howl of pain. He stumbled to his feet and his blood ran cold at the sight of Severina scrambling backward on the ground of the shrieking shack, just inches away from the tunnel entrance, her wand trained on the prone werewolf.

James charged again with all his might. This time when the werewolf crashed against the side of the shack, he whined, sighed, and went still. James stared at him, fearing he may have just killed his friend. The werewolf didn't get back up, but he was breathing and relief flooded James and he relaxed a little.

Severina stood on the other side of the doorway, inside the tunnel and called to him,

"Come." She begged him in a rushed hush, waving him into the tunnel.

He forgot briefly that he was still a stag and hurried through the doorway and she shut it behind them. They made their way through the tunnel as quickly as Severina's pace and his battered body would allow. They were half-way back to the Whomping Willow when they heard Moony howl pitifully in the shrieking shack. His claws scratching at the door echoed through the tunnel.

Severina gasped and buried her hands in his mane, gripping onto him as they reached Hogwarts. She continued out of the tunnel, into the night air but he stopped. She turned to see if he would follow. He looked at her and sighed making a decision he knew he wouldn't be able to take back.

He transformed, back into himself, right in front of her.

"James?" She gasped.

Moony howled again and James took his cloak from its hiding spot, grabbed Severina's hand and closed the tunnel's entrance.

"Come on. Before the Whomping Willow decides to pummel us." He said as he dragged her away.

Once they were a safe distance, Severina pulled her hand out of his. He spun to look at her, a little hurt that she'd taken back her hand.



“How? Did you? You’re an animagus?” She asked wildly.

James answered, careful and measured, “I’ll explain everything, I promise. Let’s just get inside, yeah?”

She blinked a lot before she nodded. James unfolded his cloak. As he threw it over them both, searing pain shot through his side and he cried out.

“You’re hurt.’ Snape said, feeling his side and pressing against his ribs, causing another spike of pain, ‘You have a broken rib. We need to get you to the hospital wing.’”

James shook his head, “No. No hospital wing. Unless,’ He looked at her, his eyes searching hers, ‘Are you hurt?”

“No. No, I think...,’ her eyes searched his face, and said in a rush of breath, ‘You saved me.”

The air between them grew thick and space between them felt unnecessary. Despite the soreness and pain in his body, James pulled her against his chest and pressed his lips to hers. He never actually kissed a girl before, not on the lips, but he’d imagined what it might be like when he finally did. This was better.

This was perfect.

Severina’s lips were warm and yielding. She melted into his embrace and gripped his shirt like she needed something to hold on to. A small whimpering moan escaped from her and he sighed, melting closer to her and relaxing further into her lips.

He didn’t really know how to continue the kiss, so he pulled away, separating their lips just enough to look into her eyes. She looked up at him with wonder.

That was the moment James Potter knew, without a doubt, that everything he had planned for his life had irreparably changed.



## Chapter 6

James lead them to the Gryffindor quidditch locker room and warded the door.

“We should, umm...,” he blushed, but looked at her with honest concern, “You should wash off and make sure you don’t have a bite or... claw marks? I’ll do the same.”

Severina nodded and hugged herself.

The showers had separate stalls and privacy curtains. They started to undress slowly, separated by tiled walls. Neither spoke but both decided to leave their undergarments on, hyperaware of how close they were to being naked together in the same room.

James heard Severina's shower turn on and the muffling of the water when she stepped under. James took off his glasses and stepped under his own shower. He washed and noted some scratches and bruises but nothing like a bite or claw mark. Not that it would have cursed him the same way in his animagus form, but it was a small comfort. He wouldn’t truly feel better until he knew Severina was out of danger.

Even if she wasn’t they would deal with it together, James decided. Even if she was bitten, he would take care of her. That decision comforted and strengthen him more than anything. He felt confident in its rightness. He’d take care of her. From now on, he would make sure she was happy, protected, provided for. It was the strangest feeling like he just realized his purpose in life- her.

He looked over at the wall separating them and listened to the water in her shower and imagined it washing over her. He smiled. He felt free. He felt like he was flying. He could almost laugh out loud with the all-encompassing joy he felt at that moment.

Love.

He was in love. That’s what it was. That’s why he felt strong and confident and full of life. He felt he could take on anything life threw at him. He didn’t care what tomorrow brought because right now, he loved.

“James?” Her soft, uncertain voice called to him and his heart filled to the brim at his name spoken with her voice.

He cleared his throat, a silly grin on his face, “Yeah?”

“I...,” her voice wobbled, “My back stings but I can’t see...”

His smile fell and the color rushed from his face. Without a second thought, he went to her, pulling her curtain away without pause. Her eyes were wide and worried, her arms crossed over her bra-clad chest and she was trembling slightly. She turned her head down and turned her back to him.

James blinked and focused on breathing. Her hair cascaded wetly down her back. Gently, he gathered it to the side, brushing it around her shoulder and revealing her skin. He didn’t have his glasses on so he had to stand quite close. There was scratch between her shoulder blades but it wasn’t a claw mark. He brushed his fingertips across her skin and sighed in relief,

“You’re okay. It’s just a scrape, probably from a broken floorboard or something.”

She gasped and she slumped a little. Relief overwhelmed them both. His forehead came to rest



against her exposed neck and his arms inched around her.

"You're okay." He repeated softly.

She was crying, he realized. So, he continued to hold her from behind, hugging her gently.

Once she calmed, she turned in his arms. She didn't meet his eyes but her hands brushed over his ribs, examining the bruise that was already forming.

"I can brew you something for this if you can get me the ingredients. Turn." She commanded and James chuckled but obeyed.

"I'm fine." He insisted but he wasn't about to object to her fingers on his skin.

Her hands fell away from him and he turned back around to her. She was blushing and her arms were crossed protectively around herself. She looked so small, skinny, frail, vulnerable and James wanted nothing more than to protect her. From what, he wasn't sure yet but that was all he wanted anymore. The feeling overwhelmed him and he couldn't help but wrap her in his arms again. His heart warmed when she rested her head against his chest and he let his cheek lay on the top of her wet hair.

They both would have liked nothing more than to stay just like that all night but James felt he needed to get Severina back to her dorm before she got in trouble.

Easier said than done, as it turned out.

Along with a broken rib, it seemed that James had also sprained his ankle. It wasn't too bad, but after the adrenaline had run off, it had started swell painfully. He needed help to get up to Gryffindor tower. Neither seemed to consider the inappropriateness of such a course of action, necessity making it the only practical option for Severina to help James to his dorm room under the cover of his invisibility cloak.

Upon entering the room, Sirius stopped his pacing, and Peter who had dozed off on his bed woke up with a snort.

"James? Is that you? What happened?" Sirius asked.

Severina pulled the cloak off of them, revealing how James leaned heavily on her. Sirius cursed and helped her get James to his bed.

"Honestly, I don't even want to talk to you right now, Padfoot." James grouched, clutching his side in pain as he sat.

"He has a broken rib and maybe a sprained ankle." Severina explained.

"What did you do to him, Snape?" Sirius turned to her, accusing.

"Me? A werewolf did this to him. A werewolf that you purposefully sent me to find!" Severina snapped.

"Well, I didn't think you were stupid enough to actually go into the shrieking shack!" Sirius countered.

"No! You didn't think I was brave enough!" She said, straightening her back and doing her best to look him in the eye.



They stared at each other down for several beats before Peter squeaked, “Why did you go in?”

James had tried to stop them arguing at first but as soon as Severina said Sirius didn’t think she was brave enough, James had only been able to stare at her. She had been brave. She had just fought a werewolf and lived. Yeah, he helped but he’d been in his animagus form. She hadn’t known it was him. He had saved her but she had tried to save him too, making sure the stag got out of the tunnel.

James was a little in awe of her at the moment.

“I had my suspicions about Lupin. I just didn’t have any proof. Now I do.” She answered, her eyes still locked with Sirius’s.

“You knew he might be a werewolf and you still went in?” Sirius asked in disbelief.

“I had to see him change.” Her stance starting to weaken.

“Why?” Sirius asked.

“I needed to know for sure and I was curious. I wanted to see the transformation.” She turned to James, her eyes pleading, “I wasn’t going to hurt him, I swear.”

James scoffed, “You hurt him? What about you?”

“I had a spell that was supposed to stun a werewolf but I didn’t expect the transformation to be so quick. I was taken by surprise at first and then a stag came racing in out of nowhere.’ She huffed and shook her head, ‘I overestimated myself. If you hadn’t come in when you did...’

James grabbed her hand and squeezed it. Sirius pinched the bridge of his nose.

“Wait, you knew that Remus is a werewolf and you went to watch his transformation? Why?’ He threw up his hands exasperated. ‘And why are you two holding hands?’

Severina sat next to James on his bed, still holding his hand and ignoring Sirius’s second question. She answered while looking at James, “I was reading about this potioneer who is working on a wolfsbane potion. He doesn’t have a lot of support right now, but I’ve read his thesis and I think he might be on to something. I’ve suspected Lupin since third-year so when I read the article, I thought maybe I could, I don’t know.’ She shook her head. ‘I just wanted to observe him, I wanted to gather information about the transformation and write to Master Belby,’ She hung her head and took her hand from James’s, putting it in her lap, ‘I wanted to see if the information could help me get an apprenticeship.’

Sirius scoffed, “In other words, you were using him to further your own ambitions. How like a Slytherin.”

“Padfoot!,” James snapped, then turning to Severina, running his fingers through his hair. He thought about how to respond to all this. He looked at Severina- her head bent forward, looking into her lap. James sighed. He brought his hand up to brush her hair out of her face and remembered how he had spelled it dry not too long ago. ‘I think that’s a really good idea.’ She looked up at him shocked, ‘If you could help Moony, it would be worth it. I mean, we could go about it differently in the future, but now that we know, we can all work together.’ James turned to his friends, ‘Right, guys? For Moony?’

Peter looked between James and Sirius unsure but eventually stuttered, “F-for Moony.”

Sirius’s face softened and he looked at Snape, “I didn’t mean for... I didn’t think...” He shook his



head and cleared his throat apparently giving up on what he was about to say, 'For Moony, but I still don't trust you. How do we know you aren't going to expose Remus? Or James for that matter? How... how do we know you aren't going to make Remus some sort of guinea pig or something?'"

"You don't." She shrugged, then sighed, 'As far as Lupin becoming a guinea pig, I think that'll be up to him."

She felt James nod beside her but when she looked over, he was actually nodding off to sleep. He was crashing and she wondered how long she had before her mind and body gave out too. Sirius noticed and they both helped James lay down. Once he was horizontal, Severina moved to the end of the bed and took off his shoes. She pulled down the sock on the swollen ankle and hissed through her teeth.

"We need to go to the hospital wing." Severina sighed.

"I don't think we should move him." Sirius said.

Severina rolled her eyes, "I meant to grab some potions and salves. I could brew some but it'd take time. Maybe you could go in the morning and tell Madame Pomphrey that he sprained his ankle playing quidditch and didn't notice until the middle of the night. But he still needs something for the broken rib."

Sirius shrugged. "Bludger hit him in the side and knocked him off his broom, didn't notice until he tried to get up for breakfast."

"It's really weird watching you two scheming. I can't decide if I approve or not." James said with a sleepy smile from his pillow.

"Yeah, it's weird." Peter agreed.

James reached his hand out toward to Severina. She stepped closer to take it and said, "I should head to my dorm."

James frowned. "I don't like the idea of you walking all the way to the dungeons yourself."

"I'll take her." Sirius offered.

Severina scoffed, "I can take care of myself," but they ignored her.

"I think I like that less." James's frown deepened.

Sirius put his hands up in surrender, "I'll be nice, I promise. A truce, for Moony, how about that Slytherina?" He asked Snape, putting his hand out for her to shake.

She stared at his hand like it might bite her. Then looking up at him with an arched eyebrow, she shook his hand, "A truce."

James eventually let her leave, but only after she promised to see him in DADA the next day. Sirius walked with her awkwardly huddled under the cloak. They didn't say a word one to each other, for a long time. Eventually, Sirius finally spoke,

"So, you and James, huh?"

"I don't know, we didn't actually talk about it. I really don't know."



“Do you like him?” He was looking at her from the corner of his eye.

She sighed in defeat, “Yes. He knows I do,” shrugged, “but he likes Lily. He always has. I can’t imagine that’s changed overnight, you know?”

Sirius was silent for a while.

“Will you still help Moony? Remus? Even if James... I don’t know.”

Severina had never seen Sirius so... well serious before. “Yeah. I promise. You know I have my own self-interest for doing it.” His jaw flexed and she huffed in frustration, “What I mean by that is, because it is in my best interest to help Lupin, you can trust that I will help him. Slytherin ambition isn’t a bad thing. Ambition is what propels the world forward. I can help him more, not because he’s my friend but because *helping him is* my ambition. You see?”

Sirius stopped and simply stared at her for a long time- like he had realized something new about her, or maybe he realized he had been looking at her from the wrong angle all this time.

“Snape, I...” He swallowed, “I’m really sorry for the way I’ve treated you.”

Severina blinked and her eyes went wide. She didn’t know what to say and he didn’t seem to wait for an answer. They walked on in silence, both thinking about what changes tomorrow might bring for them all. When they reached the dorms, Sirius said more to himself than to her,

“I wonder how Lily’s going to take this.”



## Chapter 7

Not well, as it turned out. Severina hadn't really thought about how Lily would find out. Well, truthfully, she thought if there was anything to tell Lily at all, that Potter and she would have had some sort of conversation first. That's why Severina was minding her own business during breakfast the next morning. She had arrived late and didn't expect James to even come to breakfast, thinking he would still be healing his ankle until at least morning classes. So, when the sound of someone being slapped resounded through the Great Hall, she didn't know to look for James and Lily. Until she heard someone down the table say,

"Looks like Potter and Evans are having a tiff. Wonder what he did to deserve that."

Severina looked across the Great Hall and immediately her eyes met Potter's who was looking at her somberly while a red-faced Lily got up and nearly ran out of the room, her bewildered but curious dorm mates following at her heels. Severina's eyes followed her out the door and she found herself thinking, 'what in Merlin's name just happened?'

Well, what happened was this:

Sirius hadn't been able to sleep and so he was waiting for Madame Pomphrey at the crack of dawn. She begrudgingly gave him the necessary potions and salves, all the while berating him for not bringing his friend in immediately after the accident and letting him go so long without treatment and ordered him to bring Potter to see her as soon as the salve worked enough to let him walk.

Of course, all this went in one ear and out the other and any of the information he passed to James was completely ignored. James had other things on his mind. He had his new life to start and he was eager to start it. As soon as he was able, he made it down to breakfast and went straight to wiggle in beside Lily who was chatting with her friend on the other side of her.

"Hey, Evans. Can I talk to you?"

She gave him a flirty smile and said, "For the last time, Potter, I'm not going to go out with you.' She let out a soft, coy giggle, 'At least not until the OWLs are over.'" She looked up at him through her lashes and then she frowned in thought, 'Actually, maybe not even then. Have you apologized to Severina for that stunt with the Black Lake yet?"

James frowned and mentally cursed himself, "No, not yet but I will.' Lily blinked in surprised but he continued, undeterred from his purpose, 'Actually, I just wanted to tell you because, really, you should hear it from me first. I'm going to be... dating someone... else. I mean I've asked her to be my girlfriend and she hasn't said yes, yet, but I hope she will. I know I've lead you on, and I am really sorry about that. I really did like you but I..."

"What?" Lily asked in disbelief, 'Well, who is it?"

"It's Snape... Severina."

"What do you mean it's Severina? You mean you're moving on because I'm friends with Sev? Or that you are going to be dating... Severina?" Lily laughed at the thought.

"I'm going to be dating Severina."

Lily scoffed, "Sev, would never date you. If this is some sort of prank,"



"It's not. Lily... I'm..." his eyes were so full of sorrow and earnest, 'I'm in love with her.'

Lily just stared at him for a long time; waiting for him to tell her he was joking, but he serious. In fact, she couldn't recall a time when he had ever looked this serious before. Had it been obvious and she missed it somehow? Or did something happen recently between them? Why didn't Sev tell her?

Lily's chin began to quiver and her voice filled with tears, "You said you loved me. You said you were going to marry me. You lead me on James."

"I'm sorr..."

James's head snapped to the side and his cheek stung from the impact of Lily's hand. He didn't watch as she got up and left. Instead, his eyes sought Severina's from across the room. She had been pushing her food around her plate just before her head snapped up at the sound of the slap. She looked around the Hall before finally her eyes found his.

Her eyes calmed him. Even through the sting on his face, he felt certain he made the right decision. Yes, it hurt now. He had hurt Lily and he had never meant to do that, but she'd get over it. She would move on. He couldn't. Not from Severina. He would have been miserable his whole life without her. He couldn't explain why he felt that way but he knew it, in the deepest part of himself that he would never have felt truly complete without her.

It would all work out. He was sure.

So, he ignored all the whispers and all the stares as he made his way to the other side of the Great Hall. Severina's eyes widened and she looked uncertain but he pressed forward.

Severina wasn't sure what Potter thought he was doing but walking into a snake pit seemed unwise even from her perspective. Dread filled her and the uncomfortable foreboding threatened to upturn her stomach's breakfast.

Severina got up, barely looked at James and strode out of the Hall, hoping it looked like she was following after Lily. Her plan failed spectacularly, since James followed hot on their heels, calling her name,

"Snape! Severina! Where are you going?"

As soon as they were in the hallway, she turned, grabbed his hand and tugged him into an alcove. He looked at their location a bit flustered. He had a red handprint on his cheek and he absentmindedly scratched at it as he said,

"Uh, hey. Look, I need to say..."

She didn't let him, feeling a little flustered herself,

"What was that in there? What did you say to Lily to piss her off like that?"

"Oh, I told her about us and I really need to say..."

"About...us?"

He scratched the back of his neck.

"Well I told her that I was going to try to date you. I mean I know you haven't agreed or anything



but you did say..."

"You told her that you wanted to date her friend instead of her?"

"Well yeah. I mean, I thought she should know. I figured she should find out from me first, you know?"

Severina felt like she couldn't breathe and she wasn't sure if she should be at all happy about this. Her best friend was hurting and it was partially her fault. Would Lily see it that way? Would she be mad at her? Would she stop talking to her over this?

Severina looked up at James and she wondered who looked more vulnerable and uncertain at that moment.

"Why?" She asked him.

"Because I... Well, I... I...", he sighed with a shake of his head. Then confidently in one word, answered, "You."

He said it like it was an actual answer- an obvious answer. He said it like it was the only answer he needed. The only answers either of them needed: I and you, you and I.

"I don't understand." She begged him with her voice to explain it in some way that would make it feel real.

"Yes you do. Don't you remember what you wrote? This something between us. We're not imagining it. We are drawn to each other. When I look at you, the whole world falls away. You wrote that you loved me," his voice became hushed and desperate, "You said you wished it to fade but I don't," tears swam in his eyes, "I don't want this to fade, Sev, not ever."

Severina felt so full that the emotion grew and pressed against her chest with so much light and warmth that she couldn't contain it and couldn't stamp it down. She lifted herself on her toes and pressed her lips to his. Her hand came up to cup his face and he melted at her touch. His own hands came up and held her cheeks. They both whimpered pitifully at the relief they felt in their kiss. Relief that they shared something together. Relief that all they felt was reciprocated and out of that relief desire bloomed exponentially.

Severina pulled away with a gasp and when she opened her eyes she saw James's smile, his eyes so full of hope.

"I can't do this," she thought aloud.

"What? Why not?"

"Lily's going to hate me! She may never talk to me again."

James gripped her arms gently, "Hey, Lily will be okay. It's not like she and I had really dated. Just hung out in groups with our friends. I never, we never kissed or anything. Just flirted a bit. Besides lots of guys fancy her. Her vanity is just bruised but she'll get over it pretty quick. Why should she hate you, anyway? I was the one who lead her on. Look... it'll all work out. Everything is going to be okay."

Severina blinked and nodded. That sounded logical, right? It wasn't like she planned this. She looked into James's eyes, his reassuring smile and she wanted to believe him.



Severina said sensibly, “Okay, but we do have OWLs and we don’t need to be rubbing our relationship in her face. We’ll just take things slow... what? What is it?”

James’s face had brightened considerably. His smile widened and his cheeks dimpled.

“Relationship? Does that mean you’ll be my girlfriend?”

Severina has never in her life giggled like a girl. It was not in her nature, she was much too mature for that nonsense. No, the noise she made was not a giggle. Definitely not. If anything it was more like a happy sigh that bubbled from her chest up to the back of her throat. Also, she did not smile so widely that she revealed that one dimple she possessed somewhere about her right cheek.

Well, James wouldn’t tell even if she did giggle. He decided to keep her girlish giggle to himself and he would cherish that hidden dimple on her right cheek. Those were his, for now. For now he would hoard all her happiness in his heart and in his soul. One day he would show them off. One day she’d smile openly and freely, giggle and laugh to her heart’s content. On that day he would let everyone see how completely entrancing and beautiful her happiness was. Then he would remind himself how he was the first to see it and to cherish it. He would always know that these firsts were his. So, his heart soared when she giggled and smiled until her right cheek dimpled and she said,

“Yes, James Potter, I’ll be your girlfriend.”



## Chapter 8

Remus had a headache. Actually, his whole body ached. He would love to spend the day recuperating in the hospital wing, but he needed to know what happened last night. He felt like he had been run over by the Knight Bus, repeatedly.

On his way to the Great Hall, he saw movement in an alcove. Snape emerged and Remus could only see the back of her and a hand dart out, grip her wrist and pull her back into the alcove. He thought he should go over to check on her, he was a prefect after all, but the sound he heard stopped him in his tracks.

He thought for a moment that he had heard wrong. He even considered that maybe he had momentarily lost his mind because he certainly did not just hear Snape... giggle.

What he heard next confirmed that he had definitely lost his mind.

James's voice came from the alcove in a whisper that would have been too quiet for anyone to hear. Lupin's lycanthropy, however, had cursed him with unintentional eavesdropping abilities.

"Let's skip classes and snog all day."

"In your dreams, Potter." Snape's voice answered.

Without missing a beat, Potter retorted, cheekily, "I'll see you tonight then."

There was a pause before it sounded like Snape was hiding her laughter behind her hand.

"You like that one? I've got hundreds more." James said.

"You're incorrigible."

"But you love me anyway."

There wasn't any more talking after that and Remus became decidedly uncomfortable at the sound of... kissing? He walked very quickly to the Great Hall only to run right into Sirius and Peter.

"Woah, Moony, I know you had a rough night last night but you look like you just saw a ghost... and not like, a good one." Sirius said, patting his friend on the shoulder.

Remus could only open and close his mouth without making a sound. He gestured behind him in the direction he had just come. James appeared, walking toward them with a ridiculous grin on his face and a faraway look in his eyes.

"Oh Moony," Sirius sighed, "I don't even know where to start."

So he didn't even try! Sirius just left it at that, left Remus hanging.

Remus watched James all day, hoping for some hints. Did someone douse James and Severina with a love potion last night? James's silly grin seemed permanently plastered on his face and his head was in the clouds all day.

James was part of his pack... and James was happy. Remus could feel it radiating from him. He could smell it on him- no potions, just love, and joy.



As happy as James was, Lily was... not. She didn't look heartbroken... She didn't look sad... She looked angry. Like really... really angry. Remus had seen Lily angry plenty of times before but never like this. It did not bode well.

James didn't even seem to notice. Which made it worse.

At lunch, James stared at Severina from across the room. He fidgeted a lot and barely ate anything. A few times he moved like he would get up but then Sirius would grab him and pull him back into his seat. James groaned and pouted, looking petulantly toward the Slytherin table. Snape only looked at James once, nervously bit her lip and looked back down at her food. It was enough to get a reaction out of James, however; his whole body seemed to sigh and he relaxed back into his dopey grin.

DADA was the only class they shared with Slytherin that day and it happened to be in the last period.

Remus studied Snape with interest and was even more confused by the whole situation. Snape was acting completely normal. She took her usual spot in class, kept her head down, and scribbled in the margins of her textbook while she waited for class to start.

The thing was... she was the only one, in the whole class, who was acting like nothing was different! The whole class seemed to be whispering about what happened at breakfast. What Remus had been able to gather throughout the day was this:

"Apparently, Potter cheated on Evans... with Snape!"

"I heard Snape gave Potter a love potion and plans on ruining his reputation by forcing him to date her. It's revenge for all the times he picked on her."

"Potter's just pretending. It's just another one of his pranks. Honestly, I feel bad for her. He's going to break her heart... I hope I'm there to see the fallout."

"Maybe Potter got tired of waiting for Evans to come around. Dating the ugly friend is actually very strategic. I always go for the ugly friend. Ugly girls put out. It's the low self-esteem."

"I think it's kinda sweet, you know? I bet Potter's always liked her. I mean he was always picking on her. Kind of like pulling pigtails, right?"

"I bet Snape stole Potter away for his money. Everyone knows she's dirt poor. She got herself a rich boyfriend to take care of her, good for her. Even if it did cost her Evan's friendship."

Needless to say, Remus felt rather uncomfortable about the whole thing. James, however, was completely oblivious to the whispers around him.

James didn't even glance at his usual seat behind Lily and the other Gryffindor girls, he went straight for Snape and sat in the desk next to hers. Remus looked to Sirius to see if he would sit in his usual seat, but Sirius didn't even seem phased by the change. He took the seat behind Snape. Remus's eyes widened and he looked at Peter who skittered after Sirius and James, sitting behind Sirius. Remus, naturally, had to sit with his pack. So, he sat behind James, effectively blocking Severina Snape in the corner of the class. Remus tried to ignore the increasing unease he felt when he took his seat and he heard the gasps of outrage from the Gryffindor girls and the murmurs of the class.

On a normal day, Snape would never have stood for being cornered by all four of the Marauders like this. Today, however, she only seemed slightly unsettled.



“James, I thought we weren’t going to... you know.” Snape said tense and looking nervously at Lily.

“Hmm? Weren’t going to what?” James pouted, ‘I haven’t seen you all day... I’ve missed you.”

Severina softened, “James...I...”

“Did you miss me? I haven’t stopped thinking about you all day.”

Severina groaned and let her head fall into her arms on her desk. James nudged her elbow with the back of his fingers.

“Hey, look at me... please.” James begged her.

She turned her face to look at him through her hair. James brushed it behind her ear and she blushed.

“Hi.” James said to her softly.

“What do you want, Potter?” Snape asked somewhere between sincere and annoyed. Maybe sincerely annoyed.

“Attention.” James stuck out his bottom lip dramatically and Snape huffed out a gentle laugh into her arms. James beamed at her.

They sat smiling sweetly and looking lost in each other’s eyes. Remus felt himself blush just being in proximity of such an intimate moment.

Sirius sighed, “Well, I’m going to vomit. Snape, what did you do to him?”

Snape sat up, returned to her normal severe self and said with a shrug, “He found out how much I hated him.”

There was a beat of confused silence from the Marauders before James burst out laughing. Snape smirked and smugly readied herself for the lecture. Just before the professor began class, Remus heard Sirius mumble,

“That shouldn’t ‘ve made sense.”

Later, after another awkward dinner of James staring at Snape and her glancing up to smile at him shyly, James went off to find Snape. When Remus, Sirius, and Peter got back to the room, Sirius told Remus what happened the night before.

Remus's response was to throw his fist into Sirius’s face. Sirius stumbled back and looked back at him, stunned.

“What the fuck, Black! Were you trying to get her killed? Make a murder of me?”

“I didn’t think...”

“No, you didn’t think! What if James hadn’t been there? What if he had gotten there too late? What if I woke up this morning and I had...”

Remus’s eyes went wild at the thought. He looked at Peter who cowered immediately at the look in Remus’s eyes. Remus shook his head, feeling very tired and hurt, betrayed. He sat on his bed in stunned silence.



The three boys sat in heavy silence until the door to the dorm room opened and James walked in.

Sirius looked at James, surprised but still a bit sheepish from his fight with Remus, “Didn’t expect to see you detached from Snape yet.”

“I’m not,” James said as he turned to the empty space next to him. Severina pulled the cloak off, revealing herself.

Remus shot up to his feet and was across the room in two strides. He wrapped Severina into a hug that pinned her arms awkwardly to her sides.

“Oi!” James exclaimed from Remus's side. Remus ignored him.

Remus ignored James pulled Severina away to hold her at arm's length, gripping her upper arms and looking her hard in the eyes,

“What the hell were thinking? I could have killed you!” His voice may have sounded angry but really he was terrified at the thought of what might have happened.

James put his hand on Remus’s shoulder, “But you didn’t,” and he pulled Remus into a hug. Then James smiled brightly, and started excitedly telling Remus, “Oh! We had this epic battle, Mate! You’re actually pretty terrifying when you’re all bloodthirsty... and at one point I thought I had killed you. It was awesome... I wish you could remember,” Remus blanched but James continued, ‘and I got to save my damsel in distress.” He smiled cheekily and waggled his eyebrows at Severina.

Snape scoffed but didn’t correct him. Instead, she pulled something that resembled a magazine out of James’s satchel. She busied herself with flipping through the pages until apparently she found what she was looking for. She handed it to Remus.

“This is Potion Master Belby’s thesis on the wolfsbane potion. If you’re interested, I think you and I could help him... Umph.” Severina felt all the air go out of her when the werewolf pulled her into another hug.

Severina tensed and looked at James, panicked. James’s response, however, was to wrap his arms around both of them and snuggle in. Sirius wasted no time in joining in with exuberance. James arched his neck and called out to Pettigrew, “Pete, get over here, it’s group hug time!” and to Severina's horror, Pettigrew also joined in.

The poor, confused Slytherin could only remain stiff, awkward, and uncomfortable; asking herself, ‘Why are we all hugging?’



## Chapter 9

Severina's body felt on fire; James's mouth was hot and wet and when his tongue entered hers she moaned into his. Her knees buckled and she fisted his hair. James groaned and paused to catch his breath before attacking her mouth again.

Severina fought her smile while they kissed. He liked it when she pulled his hair. She sucked his bottom lip into her mouth and gently bit down, pulling on it with her teeth and flicking her tongue over the abused lip. James shuddered. He liked that too.

Severina pushed him against the wall of the alcove and slipped her hand under his shirt. She slowed their kiss and dragged her fingernails lightly down his toned stomach. His muscles twitched beneath her fingers and he shivered.

She moved her tongue over his and into his mouth and moaned, vibrating desire across his hot and searching tongue. His knees buckled and he pressed his head back into stonewall, panting. Severina continued to press languid kisses along his cheek and his jaw and down his neck. She spread her fingers under his shirt, pressing flat against his skin as she dragged her hand up to rest above the rapid beat of his heart. She let her mouth open over the sensitive skin on his neck and her teeth bit down ever-so-gently.

"Fuck Sev," James groaned and gripped her hips, pulling her flush against him, his erection pressed hot and hard between them.

"Shh," she said, "I didn't say you could talk."

James bit his lip and stifled a moaned.

She loved him like this. Well, she loved him in a lot of ways. Every day adding another thing she loved about him. Right now, though, she loved how submissive he was when he was turned on. He was putty in her hands and she felt unbelievably sexy when he turned to mush as soon as she took control of their make-out sessions.

Snogging in every alcove in Hogwarts was not a goal she had ever had before, but she did wonder how many more were left.

"Sev, we need to stop," James gasped.

Severina pecked his cheek and slipped her hand from under his shirt. She stepped back and admired her handy work. He looked completely wrecked. His hair was mussed, his glass fogged and skewed, his shirt rumpled and his trousers tented.

James peaked at her with drunken eyes- drunk on lust; she did that to him and her smirk shifted to a fond smile. James took her hand and just held it, brushing gentle circles into her skin with his thumb. His panting calmed and he slowly regained control of himself.

Severina sometimes wondered at their dynamic. It seemed backward at times. Shouldn't she be the one telling them to stop before they went too far? Shouldn't she be setting the boundaries?

Well, she set plenty of boundaries. No kissing in front of other people. No pet names other than "Sev" and if he let "love" or "my love" slip out once in a while, she let that slide.

She wasn't sure she was ready for sex, but it surprised her that James wasn't either. It didn't bother



her. His current state, a good indication that attraction wasn't the issue.

She didn't judge him for it, rather she judged society for building a stereotype on the male gender for being overly sexualized. James was, in many ways, a very stereotypical male. In other ways, he wasn't. People just couldn't fit neatly in a stereotyped box and she was pleasantly surprised to learn of all James Potter's nuisances that didn't fit her preconceived notions of him.

Like how he was actually, really quite clever.

They had been in DADA class and he passed her a note. Which wasn't an anomaly in and of itself, he liked to pass her notes with sappy poems or ridiculous pick-up lines. Sometimes it would just be something random. Like, "I love the color of your eyes- they match your hair." That note, however, had been intercepted by the professor. Severina was mortified and sure enough, the professor read the note aloud, but what the professor read aloud was this:

"I hope Prof. Chang returns next year. Her lectures are always so interesting.' Prof Chang smiled, seeming genuinely touched, 'Why, thank you, Mr. Potter. I am glad you enjoy my class, but let's not make a habit of passing notes?'"

James smiled charmingly, "Yes Professor. I do apologize. It won't happen again."

Severina found out later that James had charmed the paper to compliment any professors that might intercept their notes in class. He had passed one to Sirius in Charms, once and it complimented Prof. Flitwick's robes. Flitwick gave James the name of his tailor after class.

It wasn't that James was some sort of genius... but he was a natural leader. In a Slytherin perspective, he coordinated and recognized each person's strengths and capitalized on them.

Like their Marauders map and being anamigus. They could also, all cast corporal Patronus charms. Well, except Pettigrew, his wasn't corporal yet.

Severina felt that, if they had a bit of Slytherin ambition between them, they could accomplish any goal they set their minds to. Therein lied the problem. They were like that muggle story, Peter Pan and the Lost Boys, they just wanted to play games and have fun.

Lily would've made a better Wendy Darling than she. Whereas, Severina would always share the qualities of the jealous villain.

Severina's own ambitions could not be ignored. She hungered for their accomplishments and wanted them for her own. Had things been different between James and herself, that hunger would have been bitter and jealous, but as it was, he shared them freely with her. That aspect of their relationship was probably the one she cherished the most- how open and freely he shared his life with her.

James promised to help her find her anamigus form and her Patronus, but with the OWLs this week, they decided to wait for next term, or during the summer if they could get together. He was as intent on the task as she was. He hoped her forms would compliment his stag but he assured her that it wouldn't change how he felt about her if they didn't. Still, she was anxious and wished they had more time to work on it.

James had his faults, of course. He could still be unbelievably arrogant and it still annoyed her how he could breeze through life with nothing but his natural charm. He was smart, clever, talented but he didn't apply himself because he didn't need to- his charm was enough. That annoyed her. Everything was so easy for him; while she felt like she had to struggle through life.



Life wasn't fair.

But, she had James. She hadn't even really wanted James. She loved him, yes, but she never really let herself want him; now, he was hers.

No, life wasn't fair, but it was better.

James smiled at her from their darkened alcove.

"The prefects will be doing their rounds soon. May I walk you to your dorm, Miss Snape?" He winked and squeezed her hand.

"Sure." Her smile fell weak.

"What's wrong, Love?"

"Nothing... I just... I'll miss you."

James pulled her into a hug and stroked her back, resting his forehead against hers.

"Me too." He tilted his chin up and pressed his lips to her brow, "I love you, Sev... so much," and he squeezed her tightly.

He held her hand all the way to the dungeons and when it came time to leave he was reluctant to let go. He watched her say the password to the Slytherin dormitory and before she disappeared completely, he called her name,

"Severina!"

She peered back at him, halfway between the door and the hall.

James smiled and mouthed the words, "I love you."

She shook her head and started to leave but he called out again,

"Severina!" He whined.

She looked back at him with a blushing face and mouthed the words, "I love you too," then she quickly disappeared into her common room, leaving a lovesick James Potter to walk himself back to Gryffindor tower.

Once inside, Severina tried to hold onto that feeling James left her with, while dread threatened to steal it away.

"Well, if it isn't Severina Snape. Just leaving Potter?"

"I must say, we underestimated you, Snape. You had us worried, always hanging out with that mudblood Evans."

"Stealing her man was a work of genius, really. The Potters are an old bloodline and wealthy too. He'd have been wasted on a mudblood. Not that you're much better, but I supposed you saw the advantage of his poor taste."

"And now that mudblood is out of both your lives. Truly, I applaud you, masterfully done."

Severina walked passed her housemates as they all started clapping and laughing.



It didn't matter. She could handle the Slytherins and actually, their opinion of her had generally improved. She would always have to watch her back in her own house, but when it came to her relationship with James, the Slytherins were 'officially' supportive. Which meant they kept their mouths shut when outside the dormitory.

Lily still wasn't speaking to her.

Severina tried to explain what happened, but neither of them handled it all that well.

"I thought we were friends, Sev. Why didn't you tell me? I thought you hated him!"

"It all happened rather quickly and... Well, you never told me you liked James, either! And you never actually dated him. I don't really understand why you're so upset..."

"Oh, so this is my fault?"

"I didn't mean it like that..."

"You know what? Save your breath, Sev. I really liked James and the *only* reason I didn't go out with him was because, the two of you never got along!"

Severina's gut twisted, "Oh, Lily..."

Severina tried to step toward her, but Lily stepped back, angry tears in her eyes. Lily looked betrayed and hurt when she walked away. Severina let her go, hoping to just give her some space, not realizing she had missed a chance just then.

After that, Lily always had a gaggle of friends around her, always whispering into Lily's ear,

"We always said she was no good. You can never trust a Slytherin. Poor James, she'll turn him dark, just watch."

"You were too good for her. You're better off. She's always been jealous of you."

"James should be with you. Snape's done something to him. You've got to get him back, Lily, for his own good."

For Severina, Lily didn't just drift away from her, she sprinted off in a separate direction. Lily was lost to her and Severina didn't know how to get her back.

Lily was always popular and well-liked. She even had close friends in Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff. Severina had been the Slytherin friend and the Hogwarts professors worshiped Lily as a symbol of House unity.

Of course, having "stolen" Potter from Lily, Severina became the instigator of dissension. She had confirmed Slytherin prejudices in the minds of many.

Ravenclaws, she found, were the meanest. Hufflepuffs, the most passive-aggressive. Gryffindors, the most violent.

Severina had become quite good at guessing which House, hexes came from. If it was a hex that effected her nose, it was Ravenclaw- the pus-squirting hex and bat-bogey hex were the current favorites. If it was a hex that affected her mobility, it was Hufflepuff- usually knee-reversal and stickfast. If it was physically painful, it was Gryffindor- the stinging jinx and the biting jinx (usually her quill during class).



There was, of course, the lovely notes that found their way onto her desks and the mirrors in the girls' bathrooms that were charmed to insult her whenever she stood in front of them. If she walked quickly enough passed the mirrors, they would all start talking at once and fade out one by one like a song sung in a round.

"Severina Snape you are a fucking slut."

"You are the ugliest bitch in Hogwarts."

"When are you going to die already, you pathetic piece of shit?"

"Could you just kill yourself and save us from having to look at your ugly face? Please?"

If Severina thought being bullied by the Marauders was bad, then being bullied by the rest of Hogwarts was the deepest level of hell.

On a more positive note, her reflexes were better than ever. Her counter-jinx, hex-deflection, and hex-breaker skills were vastly improved. She could take care of herself.

She could almost convince herself that it really wasn't so bad. Besides, no one attacked her when James or Marauders were around; so, James didn't know about it and she never told him.

How could she?

Some days it seemed like Marauders were only ones who didn't bully her. The contrast was so glaring and the relief of their presence was like an oasis. She wondered if they were even aware of the extent of what was really going on. She doubted it.

Especially not after a Gryffindor sixth-year asked James if he was dating her because she was "more willing to spread her legs for him." James broke his nose and would have done worse if Remus hadn't held him back. Then there was the time Sirius overheard some Ravenclaw girls say something disparaging about her. He never repeated what he had heard, but the girls hadn't gone a day without their hair being turned green.

Remus was probably the most aware. Remus took points as a prefect whenever he could, but most of the time,

"I hear the things they are saying about you, but I shouldn't be able to hear them. How can I explain that I heard what they said when they're clear across the room? I wish I could do more..."

They were studying together, watching James and Sirius practice quidditch. Who knows where Peter had gone.

"Have you told James? Would you like me to say something to him?" Remus asked her.

She looked up at James flying around with a quaffle dodging Sirius's attempts to steal it. His hair blew in the wind; his eyes, bright and alert; his smile, wide and dimpled; his laugh, carefree. She looked over at Remus, into his eyes and asked him seriously,

"Is James happy? With me?"

Remus smiled softly, "Yes, Sev. James has been my friend since first-year. He's a happy fellow in general, but I can sincerely say, I have never seen James happier than he is with you."

Severina nodded, "That's why I don't tell him. It's worth it- all the shit I put up with, to see him



happy,' her voice faltered and her eyes watered but she willed the tears away, 'with me.'

Remus sighed deeply, "You should know... I've tried talking to Lily, during our prefect duties but she's... she's not in a good place right now."

Severina shrugged it off and redirected instead, "How far do you think you can hear?"

He blinked at her, "I don't know. I never tested it."

"We should. I've read all I can about lycanthropy but most if it is how to defend against werewolves. Not how to live with one." She smirked at him.

He snorted and wrapped an arm around her, hugging her to his side. The Marauders hugged a lot. It was weird.

"Out of curiosity, Lupin. Why do you hug so much?"

Remus blushed and pulled his arm away quickly, "Sorry... I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable."

"Never-mind that. Are you... are you scenting me?"

Remus choked on air and Severina waited patiently for him to recover and answer her question.

"I... Yeah, actually. You're part of the pack now."

Severina couldn't help the happy smirk that turned up her lips and crinkled her eyes. "Oh...' she sighed, 'Lupin if we are going to work towards any sort of treatment then you need to tell me things like that.'

Remus nodded.

Sirius and James landed their brooms beside them. Sirius proceeded to tackle her and Remus, like a happy puppy. He even placed a noisy kiss on her temple. James ruffled Remus's hair as he sat behind her, straddling his legs around her and pulling her back against his chest.

"What are you two talking about?" James asked.

"Hmm? Oh just asking Remus why you lot hug so much." Severina answered cheekily.

James looked around at her in confusion, "What? Do Slytherins not hug?"

Severina snorted, "No. Certainly not."

"Oh... Do you want us to stop?" James asked.

Severina ducked her head and mumbled, "I didn't say *that*."

She could feel his laughter through her back. He squeezed her more tightly to himself and nuzzled her neck, laughing happily.

Severina sighed, thread her fingers through his and felt content in his arms. It was enough. Moments like this were worth walking through hell for.



## Chapter 10

James couldn't wait for the OWLs to be OVER! Summer was so close he could almost taste it.

He and Sirius had just finished their History of Magic exam. Remus was still finishing up, being a bit of a perfectionist. Peter had finished a few minutes before he and Sirius and boy was that a hit to the ego. In his own defense, he had been a bit distracted lately.

James smiled.

They were all on their way to the courtyard to meet up with Sev to help her study for her Transfiguration OWL. James felt no small amount of pride that there was a subject he could help her with. She had helped them with Potions and James had never done so well on a potions exam ever. She was so smart, so clever.

James's smile widened just thinking of her. He imagined her waiting for him under the tree in the courtyard, her hair blowing gently in the breeze. Her natural coloring contrasting nature's own hues. She would always stand out, never blending in. Her beauty could be found in that fact alone. She was unique and beautiful and he couldn't wait to see her.

James and his mates walked to the courtyard laughing and joking around. Because why not? Why wouldn't he have been blissfully happy at that moment? It wasn't like he could've known there was a reason not to be.

Everyone in the courtyard was laughing. So many laughs that it blurred into a loud hum. The laughs weren't happy though. Not that he took the time to examine it, but that laughter that burned his ears, at that moment, would forever be linked as the sound of his own heartbreak.

Severina hung under the tree where they were supposed to meet her. Her arms were stretched over her head, bound together by an invisible rope. Her legs kicked wildly under her and she looked like she was screaming but no sound came out. Her blouse looked like it had been ripped open, her bra-clad chest exposed and written across her stomach in red angry letters, "SLUT"

James ran toward her and threw away his satchel as it bounced against his hip and slowed his sprint. He reached her without hearing the laughter dying or his friends shouting at the crowd. His world was her.

He wrapped one arm around her thin waist and his other hand shook violently as he reached for his wand. He freed her from her magical binds and for a moment she collapsed in his arms. His eyes were blurred and his chest burned painfully but the weight of her grounded him.

Severina regained her feet and pushed him away, hard. James stumbled back a step. His eyes went to the red letters on her stomach and he reached out- fearing the worst. As soon as his hand touched her flesh, she smacked his hand away. He looked down as his fingers, smeared in red ink, but it was barely a comfort.

"Get away from me Potter!" she spat at him.

He watched her put herself back together, gather her things and stand, back-straightened with a cold, hard look on her face, devoid of any emotion but disgust.

"You're not worth this. I only dated you out of revenge. You can go back to your mudblood whore now," and her eyes darted into the crowd and James's stomach sickened at the thought that Lily



might be standing there. Then her dark-eyes returned to his. Even through her cold demeanor, her eyes rimmed red and tears swam in her black pools. “You and I are done.” She announced loud and clear.

Then she walked away. James stumbled like she had just struck him in his breast. His eyes watched her as she disappeared from sight.

The crowd snickered and murmured all around him. He looked at them. His accusing eyes seeking out each pair that dare meet his. Very few did.

It didn’t really matter who did it; to James, they were all guilty. Even Lily. Whose beautiful green, gem-like eyes met his softly with sorrow and pity and a glimmer of hope.

James swallowed his disgust and felt himself grow cold.

“James?” Sirius grabbed his arm. “Come on.”

James bit down on the insides of his cheeks. He grabbed his satchel and stocked away. All the way to their dorm room, his friends followed after.

Once he reached the room he grabbed the map and his cloak. He cursed himself for leaving them behind, and didn’t remember why he had.

Until he began throwing the books out of his satchel and onto his bed. His transfiguration book landed face-up and he paused. He had needed room in his satchel for it because he was meant to help Severina with OWLs.

His legs gave out on him and he fell to his knees. He hugged his head between his arms as he curled in on himself and let out a wailing cry. Sirius knelt beside him and wrapped his arms around James and rocked him as he wept.

“I know what she said, but she didn’t mean it, James. She was just hurt and embarrassed. I’m sure she didn’t mean it...” Remus tried.

James’s head shot up, “You think I’m upset with Severina?” He shook his head emphatically and spat out, ‘She needed me and I wasn’t there!’ His voice grew tortured and choked, ‘I wasn’t there and she needed me... I’m meant to protect her, aren’t I?’

James pulled at his hair and stood up; Sirius stood with him, steadying him. James forced himself to catch his breath and wiped at his nose angrily. He grabbed the map and his eyes sought her name.

She was in an empty classroom.

James grabbed his cloak and threw it around himself.

“M-maybe you should give her some time to calm down.” Peter suggested.

James’s answer was to shoot out a disembodied hand and flip his middle finger up before he made his invisible exist.



# Chapter 11

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Severina couldn't go back to her dorm and she daren't face the bathroom mirrors. She had nowhere to go. She passed first-years in the hall, who didn't quite understand why they were supposed to hate her but threw suspicious looks at her anyway. She was quickly losing her composure.

The best she could do was find an empty classroom, ward the door, put up a silencing charm and weep. Her body clutched in on itself. Her hand pulled at her hair and her nails scraped her scalp.

She lost Lily but gained James and his friends. Then, lost them all in one fell swoop- one slice of her tongue. James would hate her now. The rest of the Marauders would follow, like Lily's friends had her. Lily would hate her doubly, now.

Maybe they'd all be happier without her.

She never really fit in. She never really could. Maybe the writings on the walls were right. Maybe she should start listening to the mirrors.

Happiness was apparently, not her lot in life. She had been a fool to try for it. What was the point at all, then? What was the point of her life, if it was just to struggle all the time?

Lily had laughed.

Severina wept in earnest. Her only friend she had for the last seven years, of her short miserable life, had laughed at her humiliation.

And James...

She desperately wanted to hear him tell her that he still loved her. Tell her again, that lie she let him believe- "Everything's going to be okay."

Severina gasped and choked on the realization that he would never say it again- not to her. She had pushed him away. He had looked so heartbroken and she just walked away without looking back.

She crumbled to the floor, hugged her knees to her chest and rocked herself.

Her mind carried her to the first time he told her that he loved her- "Severina Snape, I... I love you. I love you so much." But, even that had been...

He had made a midnight picnic for them in the astronomy tower. The Marauder's map keeping watch for professors doing rounds. It was their first real date. He was nervous, so was she.

At the start of the date, he sat down next to her on the blanket he brought and said, "Look, there's something I really have to get off my chest before our relationship goes any further."

That had made her even more nervous, "Okay?" She said.

"I... Severina, I am so sorry.' He looked away but then forced himself to look her in the eye, "I'm so sorry for treating you so badly, before. You wrote that I treated you like... like shit."

He shallowed but his eyes remained on hers. 'I've thought about it a lot and I am so very sorry for



everything, I've... I've done. I'm sorry for levitating you into the Black Lake and hexing you in the halls, and calling you names,' his voice hiccuped and stuttered around his words as he got more specific, 'for calling you ugly, and making fun of you because of your clothes...' Tears started to stream down Severina's face and her breaths stuttered. James was shaking almost violently but he continued, '...were second hand, and that time I shoved cake face on your birth-' his words choked in his throat, his shoulders shook and his chin trembled.

He couldn't continue he was crying so hard. Severina wrapped her arms around herself and couldn't look at him.

He forced himself to calm enough to sit up, on his knees and take her face between his hands. He turned her face to his, his voice shook as it begged,

"Look at me, please.' She didn't want to but she did. His eyes were bright with tears and begging her to hear his words,

"I don't think that you're ugly. I think you're beautiful.' His thumbs brushed away her tears. 'I've realized, that the truth is, I don't deserve you.' He smiled sadly, and softly with great urgency like it was the most important thing in the world that she believed him, 'But I promise, right now, I will never treat you like that again. I promise that I won't mess this up. I promise I'll do everything in my power to make you happy, because, Severina Snape, I... I love you. I love you so much."

Severina's heart cried out in that empty classroom and wondered if there was any hope that he would keep his promises now.

Her wards shook and Severina stood, wand out. There was only one person who could get through her wards and she wondered if her subconscious had done that on purpose- given him a way in if he still wanted it.

The door seemed to open on its own, then close by an invisible force.

"James?" Severina whimpered but he was already flinging off his cloak.

His eyes and voice filled with concern, "Severina... Love..." was all he had to say and she lowered her wand and ran to him. He caught her in his arms.

"James..." she murmured into his chest.

"Oh, Sev, I'm so sorry I wasn't there sooner. I'm here now, Love. I'm here."

He intended to hold her and let her cry but Severina found that she didn't want to cry anymore. She wasn't the type to cry when she was happy.

She cried when she had thought she lost him, but to cry in relief? No. She'd rather not drown out the sound of his heartbeat in her ear, or distract from the warmth of his embrace.

Eventually, James asked her, "How long has this been going on, Sev?"

Severina scoffed, "Always. It just got loads worse after we started dating."

James's hold tightened and he asked, hushed, "Why didn't you tell me?"

She looked up at him, "You were so happy. For a while, it was enough. I could ignore it all because when you smiled,' she brushed his cheek with the back of her fingers, 'it was for me.' She dropped her hand to his chest and sighed, 'I guess we all have our breaking points..."



He kissed her brow, “You are not broken Severina and neither are we.”

“You still want me?” She asked, maybe just needing to hear it.

James huffed and looked at her strangely, “Of course. We’re soulmates, Sev. Can’t you feel it?”

Severina shook her head sadly, “Soulmates aren’t real, James.”

“We *are* real.’ He insisted. James searched her face, put his hand over hers, and pressed her palm firmly against his heartbeat, ‘Your soul and mine. We are real.”

Severina let her forehead fall against their joined hands and sighed. She wanted to believe him. How many times had he said something with that confidence of his and made her feel, that if she just believed, just trusted him, then maybe it would be true? She laughed at herself- oh, who was she kidding? Believing in his confidence was better than sulking in her doubts.

“Alright,’ she said, ‘Now what?’”

He kissed the top of her head, and spoke into her hair, “Well, right now, we sneak you up to the room and we study Transfigurations as we planned. Then tomorrow we show them all that they didn’t win.”

## Chapter End Notes

I know this fic is a bit... emotionally intense? So, I’ve attempted some comic relief, check out the first chapter here, [Middle of Love](#)



## Chapter 12

James walked resolutely back to Gryffindor tower; Severina followed close behind under his cloak. He had never felt so much anger in his whole life- rage simmered at the base of his ribs. If he wasn't so preoccupied with bringing Severina back to his room and making sure she felt safe, he'd probably outright attack the first person to look at him wrong.

He hoped Sirius was cooking up something good. It would have to be big- a school-wide prank. Except... James didn't want anyone laughing but himself, Severina and the Marauders. He wanted to show them all that they fucked with the wrong people.

How dare they hurt her? How dare they!

And Lily... she stood by and watched? She was being a petty little bitch and James was sick of it. He thought that she just needed time. He thought she'd come around and be happy for them. She had been friends with Sev since before Hogwarts, didn't she want her friend to be happy?

It was with these thoughts James, followed by an invisible Severina, stepped into the Gryffindor common room. A group of Gryffindor girls sat in a tight-knit group on the sofas. One of them saw James enter and whispered excitedly to the group. Lily was practically forced to her feet and pushed toward him.

He was going to keep walking but Lily reaches out and softly grasped his wrist. He stopped, looked down at her hand on his, and hated that his heart still stuttered. It wasn't anything compared to the passion he had with Sev, but he had always been drawn to Lily. Apparently, that hadn't changed.

His jaw flexed. He might be attracted to Lily, he might always be attracted to Lily, but that fact sickened him now. His conscience was repulsed.

Thankfully, Lily pulled her hand away.

"James, how are you?"

He flinched, he didn't want to talk to her. She took his silence to mean that he was still upset about what happened in the courtyard. She'd be right, but not for the reason she assumed.

"I just want you to know, I'm here if you need to talk." She brushed her perfect auburn hair behind her ear and looked at him with her clear green-eyes through her long lashes, "I'm here, James."

Her words sent a warm tingle up from his chest to his throat. It was desire and it made him want to vomit.

Is this what it was with Snape, before? The reason he bullied her? Maybe he had always wanted her too. Maybe, he just hadn't known what to do with wanting two people at the same time.

Apparently, he couldn't- he couldn't want both at once. Either he desired one and was disgusted by the other or vice versa. His soul was resolutely monogamous. Which was an interesting realization at a rather increasingly awkward moment.

"That won't be necessary. Sev and I are going to work things out." He answered and he turned toward his rooms but she stopped him again,



“What? James... I know what you said you felt for her, but Severina, she...”

“She what, Lily?” James snapped.

Lily didn’t cower, meeting his anger with her own, “You heard what she called me- a mud.... the ‘M-word.’”

“It’s just a word, Lily and she was upset...” James started, Lily cut him off,

“No, it’s more than that! Severina’s always been drawn to dark magic. Did she tell you that she writes to Lucius Malfoy regularly? That she meets with that gang of Slytherins who are intent on joining... He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named? James, Severina means to be a Death Eater as soon as we leave Hogwarts. I couldn’t change her mind and if she’s still using that word... neither have you.”

James felt fingers on his back and he might have jumped, but it was Severina’s fingers. He twisted an arm around his back and she put her cool fingers into his warm palm and he squeezed them gently. He shivered a little. Either at the coolness of her in his hand or of Lily’s assertions.

James didn’t know what to say. He didn’t know what to think! Was Sev still writing to Malfoy? Was she really intent on joining the Death Eaters? He had been so caught up in just the euphoria of falling in love that he hadn’t even thought about... No. Lily was wrong. Severina wouldn’t be a Death Eater. She wasn’t planning to join... He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. She didn’t need Lucius Malfoy and his sponsorship anymore, she had him now. She knew that, right?

James turned his hand and held Severina’s more firmly, blocking her disembodied hand with his body and guided her to the dorm room. He didn’t look back at Lily even when she called his name again and he shook her off when she touched his shoulder.

Instead the looked at the invisible spot in front of him and said loud and clear, “Severina and I are going to work things out.”

Inside the room, Sirius was pacing and talking adamantly,

“No. It’s got to be bigger! We’ve got to show them all that they can’t mess the Marauders...” he turned to look at James as they entered the room.

Severina took off the cloak slowly, her eyes on James, wary and watchful. The others didn’t notice. She was in Remus’s arms first and then Sirius joined. Peter got up from his bed, watching the reunion but not joining in.

“Welcome home, Sev.’ Sirius kissed the top of her head. ‘We were just plotting our revenge!’ Sirius said, trying to brighten the mood.

Remus smiled in reassurance and rubbed her arms, “We want you to know, you’re not alone. No matter what, you have us. You’re part of the pack, remember?”

Severina smiled tremulously and looked back at James, waiting. James smiled softly, sliding his fingers into her hair and cupping the side of her head, his thumb caressed her temple.

“That’s right, Love, you’re home. Wherever we are, is where you belong. We take care of each other. If I hadn’t made that clear before now, I’m sorry.’ He kissed her forehead, ‘If someone bothers you, you tell us. Okay?’”

Severina didn’t answer. She stepped into him and buried her face in his chest. James held her and looked over at Peter who seemed to watch them all from a distance with a strange look in his eyes.



James blinked, confused by his demeanor,

“Right, Wormtail?” James asked him. Pettigrew jerked a little and shifted his feet.

“Right. Y-yes of-f course. You know, I was just thinking of heading to the kitchens for a bit of a snack. I’ll bring you all back something, shall I?” He didn’t really wait for an answer before moving rather quickly towards the door.

“Good idea Wormy! Comfort food is just what we need! Bring me back a pasty, would’ya?” Sirius called out.

“Chocolate pudding for me, please, Peter.” Remus added.

James watched him go and felt Severina’s head shift to watch his exist also. She looked up at James from her spot against his chest and arched an eyebrow. James narrowed his eyes- she must have noticed something too.

Severina took a step away from him and looked down at her feet. She spoke quietly so only James could hear, “James about what Lily said...”

“Shh... don’t worry about that now, it’s getting late and you have a Transfigurations OWL tomorrow and I promised to help you study.”

He lead her to his bed and gathered his Transfigurations text. He pulled her to sit next to him.

“And then we need to start planning,’ Sirius said, trying to continue his train of thought from before, ‘is there a way to charm everyone’s most embarrassing secret to be written across their forehead or a potion that would make everyone have to tell their most embarrassing secret...?’”

Remus cleared his throat, “I’ve heard it said that the best revenge is to live well.”

Sirius groaned, “Ugh, Moony!”

“I think you are both on to something.’ James said diplomatically, ‘We need to live well, show them we are better and stronger together, as a pack, and that Sev is part of that. We don’t have enough time for a big enough prank to satisfy me. Not before the end of the year, but we will have all summer to work on something for next year. It won’t get the seventh-years but that can’t be helped. In the meantime, we can fall back on some old favorites. For now, we just need to get through these last couple days. Which means, Severina is never to be without one of us. Is that understood?’”

“Gotcha, Prongs,” “Of course, James,” Sirius and Remus affirmed in unison.

That was the end of the discussion. Severina tried to focus on studying and James could only comfort himself that at least she could study without fear here. There was something that felt unsettled, though, and he pulled out the Marauders map and looked for Peter.

He wasn’t in the kitchens.

James saw Severina looking too.

Severina whispered, “James? You’re not going to like what I’m about to say.... but maybe we should keep our relationship a secret for a while.”

“You’re right, I hate it.”



“Just listen. If we let them all believe that they’ve torn us apart, we can wait and watch, see who reacts and how. Maybe, see if anyone isn’t convinced by our act. Find out who is really trying to drive us apart and why.”

James looked back at the map and watched as Peter moved toward the kitchen. He swallowed.

“No. I don’t like it.”

“Fine. We can sleep on it.”

James sighed and buried his nose in her hair. How had ever made fun of her hair? It was like silk and smelled like home.

“I just want to protect you.”

“I can take care of myself. I’ve been doing it long before you and I.”

“I know. I should know better than anyone. You held your own against the four of us for nearly five years. I just... I need to. Can you be okay with that?”

She nodded, “As long as you know you don’t have to.”

James pressed his lips against her hair and they half-heartedly studied for a while. Peter returned a little while later.

“Brilliant! Pete’s back!’ Sirius jumped up eagerly, ‘Where’s my pasty?’”

“Oh, umm, I thought you said chips.”

“Eh, at least it’s fried,” Sirius shrugged, taking the chips and shoving them in his mouth.

“Here’s your chocolate cake, Moony, just like you like.”

“Ah... thank you, Peter. I do love chocolate.” Remus took his cake with a smile, though a little slowly and looking at Peter with a bit of concern.

“And some Welsh cakes for... the two love birds.” Peter smiled but it didn’t reach his eyes.

Severina took them and smiled sweetly and with sincerity lacing her smooth voice she said, “Thank you, Peter, how very thoughtful.”

Peter’s face seemed to stumble, trying to smile while not meeting her eyes.

James added in a level tone, “Yes, thank you, Peter, you’re an absolute saint.”

“Right... no problem at all. Enjoy!” Pettigrew piped out and went to retire in his own little corner of the room.

James didn’t want Severina to return to her dorm that night. He wanted to hold her in his arms. He wanted to know she was safe and he wanted her to know it too. He felt like he almost lost her today and he wanted the reassurance that he hadn’t. He wanted to wake up and the first thing he saw in the morning be her. He was afraid he might wake up and she’d decide to carry out her idea of keeping their relationship a secret. He didn’t think he could do that. Not without a great deal of pain.

But why hide?



Why was that her response when she saw Peter in Dumbledore's office? Surely, there was a reasonable explanation; but then, why hadn't he just asked Peter about it? Why did he feel like he needed to wait and watch as she had suggested?

In the end he walked her back to the dungeons before curfew under his cloak. Once they were in the alcove a little ways away from the Slytherin dorms, Severina took his face in her hands, and her voice sounded soft as velvet,

"No matter what happens tomorrow, or the day after, or for the rest of our lives, you need to know, James Potter, that I love you. That I love you with all my heart and I will never not love you. My soul will love you, always."

James's eyes burned, his throat tightened and his chin quivered. As she pulled his head down and pressed her lips to his brow, his tears fell onto her hands, which held him.

Then she left.

James spent the rest of the night convincing himself that it hadn't felt like a goodbye.



## Chapter 13

James dreamt that he lay in soft green grass with the sun hanging high above him. The light warmed his face and brightened the darkness behind his eyelids. He was surrounded by the smell of grass and wildflowers. The air tasted like freedom and summer-time leisure. He hummed his contentment.

Sweet kisses across his face, brought a warmth to his heart that was greater even than the sun's on his skin. Silken hair caressed his cheek and tickled his nose. Happy laughter bubbled in his throat. He opened his eyes and saw red and wondered if the sun had blinded him.

He blinked and squinted, trying to get the light out of his eyes. He lifted his hand, needing shade to see. He looked for those dark-eyes and that ink-black hair that he'd come to love. Instead, he saw green-eyes and rich-auburn hair.

"No." He gasped out.

"James? What's wrong?" Lily's sickly-sweet voice asked.

James scrambled to his feet and looked down at Lily angrily, "Where is Severina?"

"She left, James." She said, her voice suggesting that he should already know this.

Her head turned to look across their grassy haven. James followed her gaze to the tree line. Among the trees, the sun spilled through leaves and branches, creating a labyrinth of softened light and brightened shadow- a grey wood. He saw movement and his lungs filled with relief.

Between the trees, walking parallel to where he stood, was Severina. She passed through sun and shadow, her eyes fixed ahead of her and her posture confident and sure.

"Sev!" James called out to her but she didn't stop.

He stepped towards the trees, intent on running to Severina if she didn't turn around.

"Severina, I'm over here!"

James was near to the shade when Lily's hands grabbed him and tried to drag him back.

"No, James, stay here with me." Lily begged.

James tried to shake her off but she became more insistent, pulling on him with all her might and crying desperately,

"No, James, please! If you go in there, you might never find your way back! You can't follow her, James, you have to let her go."

James watched as Severina walked further and further away. How long until she was out of sight? Fear made the air thin.

"No! I can't lose her," James gasped desperately.

James looked down at Lily's grip on him and he pried her hands off, jerking himself away from her and stumbling into the grey shade of the woods. He didn't look at Lily again, focused on scrambling to his feet and running to catch up with Severina.



He could see her in the distance. She wasn't running and yet, no matter how fast he ran he couldn't reach her. He tripped over roots, got caught on branches, scrambled through leaves but never lost his urgency to reach her.

The woods became denser, the light thinned and the shade grew as dark as night. Severina disappeared in the thickening trees ahead. The loss of her spurred him faster.

He reached the thickening and saw her.

She wasn't alone.

Severina stood with a cloaked figure and the deep voice of a man spoke in a whisper to her, but James could not hear what he said. The man slowly lifted his hand out for her take.

James felt his heart begin to tear and he screamed out her name, "SEV!"

She heard him and started to turn her head. He saw her profile before the man hissed something to her and Severin turned again to him. The man's eyes looked at James.

The last things James saw before his eyes snapped open in a rush of consciousness were those glowing red-eyes and the heavy intoxication of power.

Even as the dream faded the feeling remained and haunted him like a fever catching.

James woke the Marauders early so they could meet Severina in the dungeons and walk her to breakfast. They were waylaid, however.

"Oh,' Dumbledore stopped before passing them in the hall like he just remembered something, 'Mr. Potter, might I have a word with you in my office?"

"Of course, Headmaster.' It wasn't as if he could refuse. Unease and suspicion spiked and James fought looking directly at Peter. Not that he would have been able to meet Peter's eyes- which were everywhere but on him or the Headmaster. Instead, James looked at Sirius and Remus, 'Go on without me, then and I'll catch up with you later."

"Of course, James." "Certainly." They replied and Peter just jerked his head in a nod.

As they turned, Dumbledore called out to them in a -*'oh you, naughty boys, you know you're not supposed to have sweets before dinner'* - tone, "There is no need to go all the way to the Dungeons to get to the Great Hall. Rest assured, I've arranged for Miss Snape to be escorted by one of her House's prefects."

"How'd you know we were going..." Sirius asked.

"Oh, my dear boy,' Dumbledore chuckled indulgently and his eyes twinkled merrily, 'You'll find that there is very little that goes on in this school that I don't know about."

Peter was looking at the floor. Sirius looked skeptical. Remus, thoughtful, and confused. James blanched and his first thought- *'Had he known about Severina being tormented?'* - was caught silent as his jaw seize up.

James looked hard at Sirius and jerked his chin up. Sirius nodded once and lead the group away. When James looked back at Dumbledore, his clear-blue eyes flashed with a hard look but quickly shifted into a perfectly pleasant expression.



“So, What are your plans for the summer?” Dumbledore asked and lead him toward the Headmaster’s office.

James answered vaguely, but that feeling that lingered from his sleep- that fever, reminded him of what Severina said the night before- *“...let them all believe that they’ve torn us apart, we can wait and watch, see who reacts and how. Maybe, see if anyone isn’t convinced by our act. Find out who is really trying to drive us apart and why.”*

They entered the office and Dumbledore sat behind his desk.

“Lemon drop?” Dumbledore asked, holding out the candy dish for James to take.

James shrugged, “sure,” and popped the candy into his mouth.

“Actually, Headmaster, most of my plans had included Severina, but after yesterday...” he let the insinuation hang.

“Hmm, yes, a disturbing incident indeed. Sometimes.... pranks can be taken too far, can’t they, Mr. Potter?”

His mind tingled with guilt. His pranks through the years flitting through his mind like a muggle film on fast-forward. When Dumbledore spoke again, James felt a sharp pain behind his eyes.

“I must say, I was... surprised by the change in your relationship with Ms. Snape. May I ask how that came about?”

James blinked rapidly feeling slight vertigo.

“Umm... Well, I... I supposed I realized my feelings for her and...”

“And What are your feelings for her?”

“Well, I... I love her...you see...”

“Yes. First loves can be... disorienting. I’ve been informed as to a certain slur, Ms. Snape used yesterday in the heat of the moment.’ Dumbledore sighed sadly, ‘I had hoped that you might be a positive influence on Ms. Snape, but I certainly wouldn’t want for her to be a poor influence on you. There is always a chance for one or the other in relationships of opposite magical proclivities.”

James’s brow wrinkled, “Forgive me, Headmaster, I’m not sure I follow.”

Dumbledore smiled kindly and clicked his tongue, “Just an old man’s ramblings. I know you’re anxious to get back to your friends, not too much longer with them before you are all home with your families again. You are dismissed, Mr. Potter. Good luck with your last OWL.”

Being dismissed, James got up to leave, but then remembered something that had bothered him acutely just moments before,

“Headmaster?”

“Hmm? Yes, Mr. Potter?”

“Did you know that Severina was being bullied, because of our relationship?”

Dumbledore’s face fell pitifully, he sighed and spoke with such sorrow that it could break a heart,



“My boy, do you really think, if I had, I wouldn’t have done everything in my power to have intervened?”

“Of course not, Headmaster, forgive me.”

Dumbledore smiled gently, “Have a good summer, Mr. Potter.”

As James left, he felt like he had just be spun in circles, around and around, and then asked to walk in a straight line.

Once he reached the Great Hall, Sirius told him,

“We still went to the Dungeons to check on Sev, sure enough, she was with a prefect, like Dumbledore said. We would have followed them anyway, but the prefect threatened to take points. Sev didn’t say anything but she gave us a look. I know that sounds weird, but that girl could raise an eyebrow and it be more damning than an hour-long sermon. So we walked ahead of them and got here in time to put out the nose-biting teacups.”

“Thanks, Mate, I appreciate it.” James said with a satisfied grin. At least he had something to cheer him up today.

“So, What did Dumbledore want?” Peter asked.

James felt like he had been struck by a blunt object on the top of his head. He tried replaying the conversation with Dumbledore and really wasn’t sure what Dumbledore wanted. James wished he could talk to Sev about it. Maybe she could make sense of it.

James shrugged and said, “To wish me a good summer, I think.”

Severina ate breakfast at Slytherin table, but not alone. She sat in the midst of the gang of Slytherin that Lily had mentioned. James rubbed at his eyes then at his chin as he looked around the Great Hall, committing faces to memory- faces he had seen twisted in cruel laughter.

James looked down the Gryffindor table and he saw Lily and her friends watching him. He smiled at them and gave them a little wave with his fingers. They tittered and the girls were saying something to Lily, nudging her. She smiled demurely and waved back at him.

James felt eyes on him and found Peter watching him. James arched his eyebrow. Peter smiled and returned to his meal but not before he glanced quickly at the head table. James looked up, but all he saw were the wings of owls passing down the table.

One landed in front of him. Once the owls had settled, James saw that Severina had received a letter but before he could even wonder about it, sharp pain in his finger startled him in his seat and he jerked his hand back,

Stupid owl.

He tossed the bird some food. The letter was from his parents.

*“We look forward to seeing you at the station, son. I’m sorry we have not written to you sooner but we did not want to distract you from your OWLs. Of course, your friend, Sirius, may visit whenever and for as long as he likes. Please tell him that we are most ready to receive him. As to the young lady you mentioned, we know you were excited to introduce us to her and we are sorry to hear that it ended poorly, but remember you are still young. Headmaster Dumbledore has been so good as to keep us*



*informed and he cautioned us that this young lady might have become a negative influence. We know you may be feeling upset now, but give it time, you will see that this is for the best. Try to focus on the last of your OWLs and we will see you soon.*

*Lots of love,  
Mom and Dad*

*P.S. What ever happened with that nice Lily girl, you introduced to us before?"*

James stared at the letter like it was some dark object to be wary of...

James heard a series of high pitched shrieking from down the table. He looked over at Lily and a couple of other girls tearfully rubbing at their noses and looking angrily at their teacups.

Damn, he'd missed it.



## Chapter 14

Severina sat in an empty compartment on the Hogwarts Express, hoping James would find her there. She really needed to talk to him alone. They hadn't been able to meet up while still at Hogwarts because Dumbledore had ordered she be shadowed by a Slytherin prefect and was only permitted in her dormitory, her Transfiguration OWL and the Great Hall; for her own protection of course. Severina hoped that such "considerations" would not carry over to next term.

She looked down at the two letters in her hands and trembled.

James has shown her more loyalty than she could've imagined from him- to his friends, yes she wouldn't have doubted that, even on his worse days, but to her? How had her life changed so much in such a short amount of time? It was dizzying.

He deserved to know. If he chose to walk away from her after this, she wouldn't be surprised. If he didn't want anything to do with her again, she wouldn't even be able to blame him. If he was going to leave her for this, she'd rather it happen sooner than later.

She hoped he would find her. She hoped he would look.

James said he believed that they were soulmates. Maybe they were, maybe they weren't, it didn't really matter. As much as her life seemed to have changed there were somethings that had not changed and would never change- one of those things was her love for him; the other...

How could a letter feel so heavy?

So lost in her thoughts she didn't even register the compartment open. Until hands reached out and touched her. Her head snapped up.

"Sev? Are you alright, Love? I've been looking all over for you." James said.

As soon as she saw him, she forgot everything else and threw her arms around his neck and pulled him into a kiss. Severina kissed him with all the longing and need and desperation she had and might ever have. Because what if he wasn't there to kiss her like this again?

She pulled away and breathed, "James" against his mouth- pleading for him to love her a little longer. Her lips begging for his honesty and his begging for more of her.

Their past kisses had all started slow and sweet, building up. Not this kiss. This kiss started with desperation and the hot burn of desire. James's hands clutched her body hard. James hadn't handled her roughly since the incident at the Black Lake. Ever since he had been intentionally careful with her- cautious to not even hint at hurting her. Now his hand gripped and pulled and held tight.

"Sev...," he gasped against her cheek, 'Sev, my love...' against her neck.

"James... James," she wanted to beg him not to stop. Never to stop loving her; never to stop kissing her like it was the only thing in life worth doing, but when she reached her fingers into his hair she found one of her hands was obstructed by its tight grip on her letters.

Severina stilled and closed her eyes. She tried to steady herself but James's mouth and tongue were hot against her burning skin.



“James,’ she panted, ‘James... we need to talk.”

His answer was to drag his hand down her skirt until he found its end. Severina felt the rough heat of his palm on her leg, just above her knee. Her heart hiccuped in her throat. She buried her face in his neck and squeezed her eyes shut.

James slowed and his breathing deepened. His hand trembled as it dragged up her thigh. It stopped more than halfway up and squeezed. Severina could feel his neck muscles swallow against her cheek.

“I don’t want to stop,’ he rasped, ‘I don’t want to talk,’ his hand lifted until only his fingertips remained to continue their path up, gently grazing her skin. Her breath became heavy and her skin shivered. His head leaning into hers, ‘I just want you.”

“I want you too,’ she whimpered pitifully against his collarbone. Severina pulled away and met his eyes. His eyes searched her face in awe and she wondered what he could possibly see in her to make him look at her like that. Her empty hand cupped his cheek, ‘Do you remember our first date? In the astronomy tower?”

He nodded, his fingers stopped their ascent but his hand remained on her thigh, palm resting and his thumb stroking circles against her skin.

She looked him in the eye, “Well, there’s something *I* need to tell you before our relationship goes any further.”

She felt her skin cool where his hand had been. Severina stepped away. James’s head hung and he didn’t look at her at first, but when he did he looked so full of despair- like he was waiting for her to tie his noose.

She sighed, “Do you want the good news or the bad news first?”

“Good news, please.” He begged.

Severina handed him the first letter. He opened it and read,

*“Ms. Snape I must say, I am most impressed with the letter you sent. Are you really, only a fifth-year?”*

*I would most willingly take you on as my apprentice. I am also, most interested in your knowledge of lycanthropy and the friend you mentioned. If your friend is willing to assist, I would, of course, respect his/her wish to remain anonymous.*

*Which, unfortunately, leads me to some obstacles for your apprenticeship. Due to the current political climate, the general and long-established prejudices surrounding lycanthropy, I have not been able to garner the support I need for my research let alone to provide for the basic needs of an apprentice. I am determined to continue my work without support if need be and if you can find a sponsor for your apprenticeship, then I will take you on most readily.*

*If you are still interested, please send me your OWL scores as soon as you receive them. Officially, I need a copy of both your OWL and NEWT scores. You need to prove satisfactory knowledge in Potions and Herbology: at least an Exceeds Expectations (E) in Potions and an Acceptable (A) or above in Herbology.*

*I hope to hear from you soon.*



*Sincerely,  
Potions Master Damocles Belby*

James looked up at her and all the light returned to his face, "But this is fantastic news! I'm sure we can sponsor you; I'll ask my parents, first thing. You can meet them at the station with me and..."

"James, wait before we get ahead of ourselves... lets out with the bad news," and she handed him the second letter.

It was a letter from Lucius Malfoy and a wedding invitation.

*"Severina, I have heard the most interesting rumors about you. Did you really steal James Potter right out from under that mud-(James skipped over the slur) 's nose? I'm impressed. Personally, I am disappointed that you didn't tell me yourself. It is really too bad that you couldn't keep him. Though, I would not be surprised if you felt a measure of relief to be free of him. Was he not your greatest tormentor? I have heard it said that 'revenge is sweet;' you really must tell me how it tastes, my dear friend, the next you write.*

*Let me now come to the point, my dearest Miss Snape. You have drawn a lot of attention to yourself, in all the right circles- or wrong, depending on how you look at it and on how well you use this advantage.*

*He wants to meet you.*

*I don't think I have to express to you the importance of this opportunity. I advise you, as your friend and mentor of these past five years, to come to my wedding dressed in something suitable. I have informed Madam Malkin in Diagon Alley to charge whatever you choose to my own account."*

"Signed, Lucius Malfoy," James finished and asked carefully, "Sev, what does this mean, exactly? Who is He?"

Severina sighed, "It means... the Dark Lord wants to meet with me, I assume, at Mafloy's wedding."

"The... Dark Lord? Sev, why didn't you tell me about this? What else are you keeping from me?" James snapped out.

"Nothing! I'm not... I didn't... Look, I didn't tell you because there was a very good chance that there would be nothing to tell. I hadn't heard from Lucius in some time and who am I that the Dark Lord would even think twice about me? Let alone meet with me? It was very likely they had forgotten all about me and it would've been a non-issue."

"You almost sound like you want this."

"You don't understand! How could you? Perfect Potter whose been given life on a silver platter. You've never had to work for a damn thing in your whole life! Never had to fight to get recognition, even now... If it weren't for you, would I have been noticed at all?"

"You're right I don't understand this at all! Why would you want to be noticed by... You-Know-Who? He's evil... He's..."

"It's not like I had a lot of options, James. This was before you and I..."



“But, you have options now. You have me now,” He stepped toward her and she looked away, wrapping her arms around herself. James put a hand on her upper arm and rubbed her in comfort, “Right? Just don’t go.”

Severina looked up at him sadly, “Oh James... don’t you see? It’s too late. I can’t defy the Dark Lord. If you thought what happened in the courtyard was bad, that was child’s play compared to what would happen if...”

“I can protect you...”

“We still have two more years at Hogwarts and I still have to live in the Slytherin dormitory. You can’t protect me there. You know, maybe... maybe all I have to do is attend the wedding... and maybe the Dark Lord will have forgotten all about me by then. It’s not like I’m really anything special. I’m just a poor, half-blood.”

“They’d be foolish not to want you. You’re brilliant and powerful. How is it that you don’t know that? Was I the one who convinced you, you weren’t?”

Severina looked at the floor, “Not just you, you can’t take all the credit.”

“Can I ask you something?”

Severina nodded.

“Do you want to be a Death Eater?” Severina shrugged and James stepped away from her, “I don’t understand, Sev! Why would you want to be one of... them? I don’t understand what you find so fascinating about the Dark Arts. It’s... it’s evil!”

“Of course... what should I expect from a boy whose idea of revenge is to *prank* the school? Evil?”

Severina scoffed and shook her head, “What a narrow-minded view and this coming from someone who’s best friends with a werewolf! You do realize werewolves are considered dark creatures? You do realize that a wolfsbane potion will require at least some amounts of dark magic? Oh, but Remus gets a pass because what?” Severina shrugged condescendingly, “Because he was sorted into Gryffindor when he was 12? You can’t ask me to be a light witch any more than I can ask you to be a dark wizard.”

At this point James sat down and just stared at her, mouth slightly gaped, but Severina barely stopped to breathe, “And being a Death Eater... it isn’t what you think... it isn’t like I have to believe in their ideologies to want what they are offering. Some of the oldest and wealthiest Wizarding families are associated with the Dark Lord. Do you know what that means? Of course, you don’t, so I’ll tell you. It doesn’t just mean financial support... it means connections... it means generations of hoarded knowledge!”

James watched Severina’s expression grow intense. His stomach dropped, and a realization came over him,

“This is what Dumbledore meant...”

Severina stopped and looked at him, “Dumbledore?”

“Yes, he said something about us having... opposite magical preferences? Proclivities?”

“What exactly, did he say about it, James?”



“He said... he had hoped I would be an influence on you rather than the other way round.”

“He’s worried I’ll turn you into a Death Eater?...”

“It sounds like *you* will. You sound like you have already made up your mind.”

“Oh, don’t look at me like that! Don’t look at me like I’m the one who’s changed- I haven’t. I loved you before and I was like this. I’ve always been this- this is me, James. I’m still that same awkward, ugly, dark girl you picked on for years. This was always the path I was on. I’m not the one who has changed, here. I’m never going to be different. I’m never going to be the kind of witch who’s satisfied just settling down and having kids; I’m always going to have my ambitions. I’m always going to be more drawn to dark magic than light. If you wanted a purely light life you should’ve chosen Lily, James.”

“You’re right, I should’ve chosen Lily...” Severina flinched- hugged herself tightly and let out a sharp sob. James jumped up from where he sat and wrapped his arms around her, ‘if... if I wanted a purely light life. Then, I should’ve chosen Lily; but I didn’t, I chose you.’ He sighed and rested his forehead on her shoulder, ‘What am I supposed to do now, Sev?’

She leaned her head against his and answered tearfully, “It’s not too late. You can still choose light. If not with Lily, then someone else.”

He shook his head, “No, it’s too late for that. I love you too much let you go.’ He held her tighter, his body shaking, “I’m just... Merlin, I’m just so scared. I’m afraid you’re going to go down a path I can’t follow.”

She didn’t speak for a moment and when she did it was in a hush, “Then come with me.”

James’s head lifted and he looked at her with narrowed eyes, “What?”

“I’m not suggesting we both become Death Eaters, just that whatever happens... just stay with me. It may be that the Dark Lord forgets all about me. It may be that your parents will agree to sponsor me and I can do my apprenticeship with Master Belby. Maybe it’s like you always say- everything will be okay.’ James huffed, regaining a little hope and looked at her lovingly. Her words encouraging and comforting, but Severina smiled sadly, ‘It’s just... if everything goes to shit. Because even at this point, whether I want it or not, I may not have a choice but to serve the Dark Lord in some capacity. If you can’t... be there for me... support me? And I know it’s not fair to ask you this... I know we are still young and our relationship relatively new, but if you don’t think you can handle the thought of me being a Death Eater, I’d rather you walked away right now.”

James sighed and his head fell back, looking up at the ceiling of the train. Severina stood still, patiently waiting. Eventually, he looked back down at her and shook his head,

“I’m not going to abandon you. Not now, not ever. One of these days maybe you’ll actually believe me. Don’t you remember? I don’t want this to fade- this thing you and I have, not ever. We are soulmates. I believe it with all my heart.”

“Your soul and mine?” She asked, remembering.

He nodded, “Always,” and kissed her.



## Chapter 15

James and Severina spent the rest of the ride separately. James hated it.

“James, it won’t be forever, but we need to try to keep our relationship a secret at least until after Malfoy’s wedding.”

“Why? I don’t understand why I can’t come with you! I don’t want to hide us... I told you I wasn’t going to abandon you and how am I supposed to take care of you if I’m not there? I just want to protect you!”

“And I want to protect *you*! I want to protect *us*! If you are there, it’ll draw attention. You said Dumbledore was worried that I might be a bad influence on you. What if that’s exactly what the Dark Lord hopes too? What if they just want to use me to get to you?”

“Then maybe you shouldn’t go walking into their trap alone! Maybe you shouldn’t go at all.”

“James, we talked about this. That’s only a short term solution. I think our best plan, is for me to make an appearance, show that I’ve complied with the Dark Lord’s wishes and try to be invisible and uninteresting enough for the Dark Lord to either forget all about me or decide I’m not worth it.”

“I still don’t like it.”

“Sirius will be there, right? As long as he doesn’t give me undue attention...”

“I’ll talk to him. He’s been talking about running away from home. I told him he can come stay with me, but I’ll ask if he can wait until after Malfoy’s wedding. Then, you both can come to my house and... Oh! What if I came with you to the wedding, under my cloak?”

“And if the Dark Lord discovered you? He could kill you, James!”

James shrugged with that arrogant smirk that Severina most definitely did not think was ‘cute’ at all.

“He won’t. It’s perfect! I’ll be like an invisible James Bond! You know the muggle movie?”

Severina rolled her eyes, “Yes, I know who James Bond is.”

James plastered a smarmy smile on his face and arched his eyebrow, “Potter, James Potter.”

Severina tried not to laugh, she really did. James broke and laughed with her but he was caught by the warmth and lightness in his chest. He loved it when she looked like this– happy, carefree, like any sixteen-year-old should.

It was fleeting, though, she sighed and looked up at him somberly, “Why do I feel like we’re stuck in a Shakespeare tragedy?”

James crinkled his brow, “A whose what now?”

Severina smirked but her eyes danced fondly, “Don’t worry your pretty little head about it,” and pecked his cheek, “You should probably get back to the guys.”

James felt a sudden rush of disappointment, “I don’t want to say goodbye. I want you to come with



me, sit with the guys, meet my parents,' he pulled her into his arms and pressed his lips to her temple, 'live happily ever after.'

Severina sighed heavily, "I would like to meet your parents. It'll be important to have their support."

"Maybe you can come over for dinner. We'll go pick out your dress for the wedding and then have a nice family dinner."

"James..." Her voice warned.

"I'll be under my cloak. No worries."

"Why would you want to help me pick out a dress?"

James looked at her like the answer was obvious, "Because that's what boyfriends do. You know what? I bet if Romeo had an invisibility cloak, I doubt he and Juliet would have ended in tragedy.' Severina's eye widened a little, 'What? My mum loves Shakespeare. I was only teasing you,' Severina slapped his chest and huffed, 'Oh, you know you love me more because I know who Shakespeare is and understood your reference. Not all brawn, eh?' and he waggled his eyebrows.

Severina chuckled and kissed him softly. When they separated, she said seriously, "Don't get caught at the wedding, James. I couldn't bear to lose you, not now..."

"Not ever." James assured her.

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Severina didn't watch James and the Marauders say their goodbyes at the station. She caught a glimpse of them, however, and wasn't surprised that even Pettigrew was there. Whether it was a general male-Gryffindor failing or uniquely James's, he seemed to believe it the highest dishonor to mistrust a friend. James wanted to give Pettigrew a chance to come to him and explain himself. Severina felt that James would have to confront him eventually but for now, she would wait and watch.

Severina caught sight of her mother. Eileen would have had to hide money away for weeks to afford the tube for them. Severina would bring in what little money she could from working at a chippy during the summer hols.

As many changes as her Hogwarts life had undergone, it was almost surreal how unchanged her home life was in comparison. She wondered if she didn't prefer her father's drunken shouts over the cruelty of her peers.

She and Lily kept out of each other's way. It was a small town so it couldn't be avoided completely, but it was too late for them now. Lily crossed a line and Severina wasn't about to go crawling back begging Lily to be her friend again like she used to when they were children.

The muggles at the chippy were actually rather nice to her. At least they appreciated that she could fry fish and chips without burning them and her supervisor said that they always have more customers during the summer when she was home from school.

Her summer at home was nearly pleasant. She received letters from James, who learned to use muggle mail. Along with work and homework and writing James, she was also brewing constantly.

James sent her packages of potions ingredients which she had to hide from Tobias but as long as



she kept it in her room and her mum spelled her room not to let out the fumes into the house, he was blissfully ignorant.

She told her mother the brewing was for her apprenticeship which she did tell her mum a bit about. Severina thought Eileen had looked proud or maybe just relieved that she had prospects for when she graduated Hogwarts.

In reality she was brewing a variety of potions for pranks throughout the year. It seemed to her, that the Marauders were planning a prank for every day of the school year. She'd probably be brewing all year long. Nevertheless, Severina was pleasantly surprised to find that James had a rather inventive mind when it came to potions and she loved him more for it.

He wrote to her everyday and she'd write back every night when she got home from work and received another letter. Not all his letters were those of schoolboy pranks, some...

*Severina, my soul, I can't wait to see you again. I wake every morning grateful that it is one day closer to being in your presence.*

*I know you must think that I am being overly romantic. How did you refer to my notes in class? Cheesy? Corny? Even now I can almost see you smiling and laughing at me. How can I not laugh with you? When just thinking of your smile brings such a flood of joy to my heart?*

*You are with me every day, my love, my soul, every day in my thoughts and in my heart. Your letters are my only sustenance. I tell myself it is only temporary. I tell myself this restlessness, I feel in your absence, will flee from me as soon as we are together again.*

*I cannot sleep at night until I have thought of you. I think of your kisses and I remember your lips and how they felt against mine. I crave your passion and the passion you ignite in me. I wonder, do you ever think of me?*

Yes, she thought of him every night and in the morning, she thought of him. She thought of his lips, his mouth, his tongue. She thought of his hands on her skin, his breathy moans intermingled with her own. She thought of him until her body burned, inside and out and she was damp with arousal. Oh, how his words frustrated her body- how he made her want him.

The memory of his words from the train, haunted her- *'I don't want to stop... I don't want to talk... I just want you.'*

He wanted her and she wanted him. Was it not then, the most natural thing in the world to long for the physical consummation of all they felt for each other? So, of course, she thought of him; of course, she wondered how he might fulfill that ever building need for him. She longed to be one body with him.

Every day she was more convinced in his belief of soulmates. He was hers and she, his. Every day her soul seemed to cry for its mate. Why not her body also?

The day they met to pick out her dress at Madam Malkin's, was it any wonder they couldn't keep their hands off one another?

James's lips pressed softly against her neck, invisible to all but her skin. Severina stood in front of the dressing room mirror wearing a simple mid-length off the shoulder gown that shimmered delicately with emerald laced hues. It was simple enough to not be noticed and pretty enough to not



disappoint.

James certainly wasn't, his body pressed against her back, his appreciation pressed hard and firm against her buttocks. Severina stifled a moan,

"I think this is the dress." Severina whispered to her shoulder.

"Thank fuck... let's buy the damn dress so I can get you home." James groaned.

Severina pulled James into the dressing room and there was never a time his hands were not on her as she disrobed. Severina reached for him blindly, once her dress was off and James kissed her madly. She pushed off his cloak and her arms reached up around his neck, stretching her bare chest up against his.

Because of the cut of her dress, she had only kept her panties on and James had been in the dressing room with her when she bared herself. He had taken off his cloak slowly, as though in a trance, "Oh Severina..." he had breathed so softly she almost hadn't heard him, 'you are so beautiful. I can't believe you're mine.'

Severina took a step toward him, took his hand in hers and pressed his palm to her breast. James trembled at the softness in his hand. Severina watched as he swallowed and seemed to struggle to breathe.

He was not so hesitant now; not that he was any less enraptured. His hand palmed her breast and the other gripped her buttocks, pulling her against his hardened length as he devoured her mouth.

"Sev, touch me, please... I need you," was his breathy plea whispered against her lips.

Severina moaned and ran her hand down his clothed chest and her fingers passed over his stomach...

"Miss Snape?" Madame Malkin's voice called out from the other side of the dressing room, "Have you made your selection?"

Severina recovered as quickly as she could but still thought her voice was a little higher than usual, "Yes, Madame Malkin. I have."

"Mr. Lucius Malfoy has just now floo called and wanted to make sure I approve of your selection."

"Oh, did he?" Severina gritted her teeth, 'Well I've just taken it off... I'll put it on again, shall I?'

"I'll be waiting just outside." Madame confirmed.

Severina groaned and went about quickly putting the dress back on while James took his glasses off and rubbed a hand down his face- his shoulders shook with laughter. Once dressed, Severina slapped his shoulder to get his attention and put her finger on her lips in a silent- 'shh!'

James merely winked at her before cloaking himself once more.



## Chapter 16

Unfortunately, there was no opportunities for further explorations for the amorous and hormonal couple when they finally flooded to the Potter residence.

“Oh my dear Severina! Jamie has told us so much about you. We are so glad to meet you.” James’s mother greeted her warmly as soon as they stepped through the floo. Severina schooled herself and put her memories of James and their activities in the dressing room aside. She couldn’t believe how far they’d gone, they’d almost...

“We do hope you like roasts. We have a house-elf but she’s getting on in age, I’m afraid, and she can only remember about three recipes: breakfast, lunch, and dinner, but they are always delicious.” Mr. Potter said warmly, a slight chuckle in his voice.

Severina was surprised by their age. James had said that they were older but she expected late-forties, early-fifties. This couple looked to be pushing seventy.

“Thank you... and yes I do like roasts. Umm, it is very good to meet you both. James speaks highly of you.” Severina said as politely as she could, a little taken aback by the older couples’ enthusiasm to meet her. She wondered if anyone had ever been so overtly excited to meet her before. Though, she wished James had told her a bit more about his parents. She felt like she was walking in the dark.

“She is absolutely darling, Jamie.” Mrs. Potter said as they made their way into the dining room.

“James has done nothing but sing your praises since we picked him up from the platform. I’m sorry we could not meet you at the station.” Mr. Potter said kindly, but a little probing.

“I wish I could have met you both then as well, but my mother was waiting and we use muggle transportation which is more time-intensive than apparition.”

Mr. Potter hummed and Mrs. Potter perked up.

“Oh, is your mother muggle?”

“No, my father is muggle and my mother’s a witch. My mother, out of...’ Severina cleared her throat, ‘respect for my father, doesn’t use magic outside the home very often and isn’t as confident in apparition as she may once have been; especially side-long.”

Eileen had splinched Severina once. It wasn’t too horrible just a bit of hair or a fingernail or something that eventually grew back (Severina was too young to remember), but it had shaken her mother enough to never try side-long apparition again with her.

James felt rather neglected throughout dinner, which annoyed him. It wasn’t that his parents’ attention was on Severina, so much, even though that too was a bit odd for him since he was usually his parents’ sole interest when he was home. No, it was that Severina was practically ignoring him. After what happened in the dressing room, he really wanted some contact; he wanted her to hold his hand or press her knee against his or at least look at him. Instead, Severina kept looking at his father strangely and James didn’t understand.

Eventually, Severina revealed the source of her interest, “Forgive me, Mr. Potter, but I cannot shake this feeling that I have seen you before. It’s taken me until now to remember why you look so familiar. Are you, by chance, *Fleamont* Potter?”



Mr. Potter smiled, a little confused, "Why yes, my dear, I am."

Severina's eyes seemed to brighten and James felt further confused.

"Potions Master Fleamont Potter, who invented the Sleekeazy's Hair Potion?"

Mr. Potter chuckled and James could've sworn that his father was blushing.

"Yes, well that was a long time ago, I made my fortune and am happily retired now."

Severina smiled brightly and turned to James, "Why didn't you tell me?"

James wrinkled his brow, "Why would you be interested in my father when you have me?"

Mr. and Mrs. Potter chuckled fondly, not at all offended by James's remark and Severina rolled her eyes. Severina cleared her throat and turned again to Mr. Potter,

"Have you by chance, kept up with current potion periodicals? In particular, are you familiar with Master Belby?"

"Indeed, I still enjoy reading the Potions Journal from time to time. I read Belby's proposal on a wolfsbane potion, but I can certainly see why anyone would be reluctant to support such a venture."

James perked up, "Why not?"

Mr. Potter blinked at his son and spoke gently, "Because we are at war, James. The Daily Prophet says that... He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named has werewolves who have joined his side."

James shook his head a little, "I don't understand."

Mr. Potter may have continued but Severina was the one to explain, "Because James, the wolfsbane potion doesn't cure lycanthropy. It eases the transformation and allows the drinker to retain their consciousness while in their wolf-form. Do you see? If such a potion were in the Dar... You-Know-Who's hands, the werewolves on his side could be a more deadly force than they already are."

Mr. Potter looked at Severina, thoughtfully, "You are not what I expected, Severina. I must admit, I was willing enough to meet with you and give you a chance because James speaks warmly of you, but we had received a letter from Headmaster Dumbledore... Well, let's just say we weren't quite sure what to think. Now having met you, I see that you are a most bright young lady and I can see why my son is so taken with you." he smiled.

"She really is dad and I wanted you to meet her before I asked, but do you think we could sponsor her apprenticeship with Master Belby?"

Mr. Potter's grey-eyebrows shot up, "Ah, so that's why you were asking about Master Belby's work."

Severina tried to stamp down her blush, "Yes sir, I've already written to Master Belby and he has agreed to take me on as an apprentice as long as I can get a sponsor. As you mentioned earlier..."

"Oh do let's, darling! I'm quite taken with her already. Indeed, I've been perfectly fond of her as soon as I saw how our dear Jamie's face positively lit up when he first spoke to us about her."

Mr. Potter chuckled and smiled affectionately at his wife. He sighed, "If I weren't retired, I'd take



you on myself... hmm, well, you wish to be a potion's mistress? How are your grades?"

"She's top of the class, Dad." James said proudly.

"In potions, second overall." Severina clarified. Lily was top of the class and in potions, they were nearly tied. Lily was Slughorn's favorite which Severina had been able to shrug off in the past but now that favoritism itched like a rash.

James continued, "Severina helped me study for my OWL Potion examination and I'm positive I've never understood potions so well as when Severina explained it to me," James gushed while winking innocently enough to Severina.

The truth was, the way James 'understood potions' and the way Severina 'explained it' to him was through a system of rewarding good behavior and withholding rewards for incorrect behavior. In other words, James received kisses when he got answers right and he got ignored when he answered incorrectly.

Severina tried not to blush and if she did, she hoped it was perceived as modesty.

"Well, my dearest Miss Snape, I Fleamont Potter, do most happily agree to sponsor your apprenticeship. Whether or not it is with Master Belby. I think I would like to write Belby myself and understand *his* intention for his potion. Nevertheless and even if I have to apply for my own renewal of membership with the Potions Masters Guild and see to your apprenticeship myself, I will see you a Potions Mistress." Mr. Potter smiled and his eyes twinkled more genuinely than ever Headmaster Dumbledore's did.

Mrs. Potter gasped happily, rose up and kissed her husband's cheek.

Severina was speechless and could only manage a, "Th-thank you, sir. Mr. Potter, thank you."

She turned to James, eyes wide, bright and full of hope, a smile unable to contain itself on her lips. James smiled widely and Severina was struck by a realization- she had financial support, a sponsor, an apprenticeship. Her future was sure.

James was taking care of her, just like he said he would.

Something else he said to her on the train, coming back to her in a rush- *'You're brilliant and powerful. How is it that you don't know that?'* She wondered if he might be right about that too. It was such a simple thing, but with Malfoy's wedding quickly approaching, she realized something significant- the Dark Lord had nothing to offer her that she didn't already have.

Even that longing for somewhere to belong, somewhere to fit in... Sirius, Remus, and James, after that horrible incident in the courtyard, welcomed her with open arms and said- *'Welcome home, Sev.'* *'We want you to know, you're not alone. No matter what, you have us. You're part of the pack, remember?'* *'That's right, Love, you're home. Wherever we are, is where you belong. We take care of each other.'*

The Dark Lord had nothing to offer her.

"What is it?" James asked her softly, a bit concerned by the thoughtful look on her face.

Severina's eyes focused on his, and said so only he might hear, "I think, that you may have saved my life... again."



## Chapter 17

After the Potters agreed to sponsor Severina, several things happened within such a short amount of time, to Severina it felt like stars aligning and she never believed such things before. She never let herself believe that life would give her anything without having to fight and struggle. She fully expected to claw her way through life, kicking and screaming and scraping through the best she could.

How quickly life changed.

Mr. Potter suggested that they start an unofficial apprenticeship. Severina quit her job at the chippy and told her mother. Eileen only nodded, an eyebrow arching a moment before walking away. Severina was hurt at first, thinking ‘Why can’t my Mum just be happy for me?’ but Eileen returned holding the few spellbooks she had kept throughout the years and her wand.

“I want you to have these. You’re going to be seventeen this year, Severina, you’ll come of age in the Wizarding world. Tobias has gotten a job in Australia. I’m going with him and I’m leaving magic behind, completely. It’ll be a fresh start for him and me, a second chance. I know you must judge me, but despite our turbulent relationship, I do love Tobias,’ Severina very rarely saw her mother cry, even now, only a single tear hung on her lash, ‘We were going to give you Spinners End, but perhaps...”

“Sell it.” Severina agreed with a nod.

Eileen nodded.

“When were you going to tell me?” Severina asked.

Her mother answered, “At the station, if not before.”

Severina could only nod again. Neither found that they needed to say much more.

The Potters picked her up the next day. The Snape family was never one to hug, nevertheless, Severina wrapped her arms around her mother and said,

“For what it’s worth, thank you and good luck in Australia.”

“Goodbye, Severina. I’ll consider writing.”

Severina nodded and as she pulled away from her mother, she looked at her father. His eyes were more peaceful than she’d seen and his last words to his daughter,

“Take care of yourself, girl, and do yourself a favor- don’t look back.”

Severina nodded and turned away from them, taking her father’s advice. James wrapped his arms around her and his father wrapped his arms around them both, apparating them home.

Severina found in the Potters, parents she could never have dreamt up because she would never have known parents could even be...

“This is excellent work, Severina.” Mr. Potter told her during their potions lessons.

“I dare say, you could very well pass the Guild’s Masters Certification exam now. Which speaks both to your skill and to the Guild’s ever lowing standards,’ Mr. Potter chuckled, ‘You could very



easily be the youngest Potions Mistress or Master for that matter in, oh... centuries I imagine.” Mr. Potter patted her shoulder proudly and Severina had to stamp down the tears that threatened.

“Thank you, Mr. Potter. That would be quite an honor.”

“We are so very proud of you Severina.” He wrapped an arm around her and gently squeezed her shoulders into his side. She nearly broke.

“Oh, Severina, you have such lovely hair. Thank you, so much for allowing me to do this for you. I never had a daughter and Jamie won’t let me near his hair.” Mrs. Potter said while brushing Severina's hair before bed.

That was it and Severina broke, powerful sobs ripped from her throat.

“Oh, sweetheart, what’s wrong?” Mrs. Potter asked as she sat next to her on the bed and pulled her into her arms.

Severina sniffed and through the clenched pain in her throat asked, “Why are you doing all of this... for me?”

By now Mrs. Potter also had tears in her eyes, but hers did not hold any pain at all, only, “Because we love you, dear one,” and she rocked Severina gently and hummed a soft and happy tune until Severina was too happy to cry anymore.

The next day, Mr. Potter explained a little further,

“You know that James loves you very much? He’s very serious about his future with you and James is rarely all that serious,” he chuckled, “but when he talks about you, I can see the man he’s going to become. You have given me that, my dear,” and he smiled, “My wife and I are getting older. You see, we had given up hope of ever having children, so when James came; he was a very happy surprise. But we understand that we won’t always be there for him. It is a comfort to us, to know he’ll have you.”

He took her hand in his and patted it. Severina wished she could give him something...

“Mr. Potter, you should know, that despite my age, I am not one to give my heart easily or to ever take it back once I’ve given it. That’s just the way I’m built.” She hoped he understood.

“James is built the same.” He smiled, “You are well suited for each other. You’re lucky to have found each other so early in life. I am glad we have this chance to know you. Indeed, we quite think of you as a daughter already. If that’s alright with you, of course.”

Severina nodded and hugged him because she didn’t know how else to say thank you. She didn’t know how to express all she felt, but she tried. She tried. Each day, she smiled more, hugged often, and laughed freely. Thanking them without words- thank you for loving me.

Of course, the Potters’ care and attention healed more than her heart. She was healthier than she had ever been. Some days, James could hardly believe the transformation. She was more beautiful every day. She started taking more care of herself, of him and his parents.

Life was perfect; love, euphoric; laughter, frequent and the future bright.

One of the benefits or perhaps oddities of having elderly parents, James found, was that they were apparently old enough to have grown out of caring much about propriety. They simply assumed that James and Severina would carry on behind their backs. They didn’t try to keep them from each



other. In fact, they gave the two adjoining rooms.

Mr. Potter took James aside while Mrs. Potter took Severina aside and without any embarrassment on their part while causing excruciating embarrassment to the teens, they gave them ‘the talk’ and taught them contraceptive charms along with silencing charms and asked only that they be as discrete as possible. Severina was too shocked to respond much, while still absorbing the information. James was cherry-red but kept his damn mouth shut and was sure he’d never paid so much attention in any class at school before.

Their first time, they weren’t sure they’d even go as far as they did. They were almost lazy about it. Simply touching, like their bodies were an extension of their own, they’d simply not explored yet. Finding what felt good, what felt right; what tickled, what drew out gasps and moans, what build heat and moisture until it was the most natural thing to fill and be filled with each other.

The first time, James almost couldn’t continue once he had joined them. Despite the desperation he had felt for her, moments before, he was overwhelmed by how *whole* he felt. There had been little pain and discomfort on her part and when he looked down on her, her eyes were moist and two tears gathered in each eye, finally falling down her temples. Tears gathered in his own eyes and his breath shuddered in his chest. His eyes couldn’t stop looking at her, mapping her face at this moment.

Her hands came up and cupped his cheeks, her thumbs brushing away his own tears, as he held himself above her.

His voice choked with the emotion of the moment, “I love you, so much.”

Severina looked up at him in wonder, her body trembling, “I love you forever, James.”

Their couplings would often mirror this first. Their joinings a physical expression of their love—always steady, reaffirming, unhurried, unafraid. They’d have moments of teasing and laughter, of passion for each other that could not be contained. They were each other’s solace and stability in life and even at sixteen they knew that and that it would never change. Why hurry then? Why feel any desperation at all when they were alone together? Let the rest of the world burn around them, it could offer them nothing they didn’t already have in each other.



## Chapter 18

James rubbed his legs, careful not to disturb his cloak too much. He stretched and shifted around. He had been standing for the entire wedding ceremony. He was able to snatch some fire whiskey at the cocktail hour, though.

Being an invisible James Bond was not what he thought it would be. He could keep watch over Severina and Sirius, but all he could really do is wait and watch.

Which proved hardest when Malfoy's ring bearer turned out to be a white peacock with a little hanging basket from its beak with the rings inside. James had almost laughed out loud and one glance at Sirius, he almost lost it. Sirius had snorted and then got a good smack on the back of his head from his mother. James looked over at Severina and she was surprisingly straight-faced. She looked bored and for some reason that was almost funnier than Sirius's snort.

James looked across the wedding guests. He recognized many but no one looked like he could be... You-Know-Who. James was starting to think that maybe Severina's plan was working. She sat at a table that was filled with minor ministry officials, to the side and out of the way. On her left was a young boy who was going to be a first-year at Hogwarts. The boy pestered Severina for several minutes about what Hogwarts was like.

Severina answered his questions bluntly and concisely. The boy soon ran out of questions and grew bored that Severina wouldn't indulge his curiosity in more detail. Severina smirked and it was the first time she came close to smiling since she arrived at Malfoy Manor.

James leaned down and blew on her neck. Severina didn't react at all, ignored him completely. James pinched his lips and tried again. Nothing. This time he blew harder and in random patterns-streams of air blowing in circles and zig-zags across her neck. She picked up her glass of water and took a sip.

James decided to try Sirius for a while. Sirius reacted better, meaning he reacted at all. When James blew patterns into the back of his neck, Sirius covered his laugh with a ridiculous fake cough and everyone at his table looked at him with almost identical arched eyebrows. James did snort at that and Sirius pretended to blow his nose, to cover it up.

"Excuse me... allergies." Sirius said.

Regulus leaned over and hissed, "Why can't you just be normal?"

Sirius gasped and pressed an offended hand to his chest. Then he leaned into his brother,

"I am normal. It's you lot, who act like you store your wands up your arse."

Regulus scowled, picked up his glass of water and took a sip. James wondered if that was part of Slytherin training- 'Don't respond to Gryffindors; hydrate instead.' James thought about spitting in Regulus's water, but Sirius stretched dramatically, trying to smack into James. James gave Sirius a good poke in the back of the head before deciding to return to Severina.

When James returned, food had been served. Severina was delicately eating her salad and talking to the wizard on her right. James hadn't really noticed the man before. The man on her right looked to be middle-aged and had sat sipping his whiskey and scanning the room looking bored, while Severina had talked to the boy. Now, however, the man's attention was on Severina and looking slightly less bored. As James neared he could make out some of their conversation,



“Did you enjoy the ceremony?” The man asked her.

“Yes.” Severina answered shortly.

The man, unlike the boy, did not seem put off by her brief reply. Instead, he smirked,

“I know I particularly enjoyed their unique choice in ring bearer.”

Severina looked at the man from the corner of her eyes, eyebrow arching elegantly and a smirk playing on her lips.

Severina replied, “Indeed, the ring bearer complemented the bride and groom well.”

“Especially the groom.” The man remarked with a grin.

Severina shifted a little, her smirk growing and she picked up her glass of water to hide it behind a sip.

The man’s eyes were watchful and his grin almost showed teeth before he spoke again, “I’m not sure I’ve ever seen a groom nearly upstage his bride with the elegance of his robes before.”

Severina hollowed her cheeks to stave her laughter, before taking a breath and said aside, “I’m not sure that it is good manners to speak of our hosts in such a way, sir.”

The man chuckled and delicately placed a crouton in his mouth. He chewed it and James felt a rolling in his belly. He hoped that it was just his hunger and not the discomfort he felt with this man’s interaction with Sev. They weren’t flirting or anything... unless, this was how stuck-up, middle-aged, creepy Slytherin flirted with girls half their age.

James stepped to the other side of the man while he was talking to Severina and swiped his dinner roll. The man didn’t notice, his attention on his conversation.

“You’re a Slytherin... I’m assuming?” He asked her.

“Yes.” She answered.

The man huffed a little, “Do you consider yourself ambitious?” He tried again to draw her into conversation.

Severina didn’t even look at the man, she simply said, unimpressed, “I’m a Slytherin.”

The main course was served and the dinner roll James had scarfed down had done nothing but draw attention to the emptiness in his stomach. His legs were cramping again, so he decided to stretch them and steal some more food. Maybe he could spit in Regulus’s drink while he was at it...

Besides, he’d be back before dinner ended and then maybe they could make their escape. Severina made her appearance and the only people who paid her any attention was a twelve-year-old boy and a middle-aged bore.

As for Severina, she wished the man beside her would stop trying to talk to her. He was handsome and charming enough, he should just save his energies for some other witch. She was too busy subtly scanning the room, trying to discern which wizard could be the Dark Lord.

Perhaps it was Abraxas Malfoy, but no, she doubted he’d be subtle enough to be the mysterious Dark Lord. Maybe it was Orion Black, but certainly, Sirius would know. Really, the Dark Lord



could be anyone...

The man beside her hummed, "I can't tell you how many Slytherin I've met whose only life ambition is to marry the right person, make an heir and not put too great a dent in their family's fortune," his eyes glancing briefly up at the bride and groom.

Severina wasn't sure why she felt the need to defend Lucius so much, "Lucius has ambitions for the Ministry of Magic."

The man looked at her, "You assume I was referring to the groom, but I was asking after your own ambitions. How would you describe your life's greatest ambition?"

She thought about the man's question and wondered where her ambitions had gone. She thought about her future life with James. Married with children doted on by their grandparents. Brewing whenever she liked. Never having to worry about money. By then maybe she'd have helped ease Remus's lycanthropy. Maybe by then Remus and Sirius will have realized their feelings for each other and be married with a child of their own. War would be far from their minds- safe and happy in their quaint little lives.

Where had her ambition gone?

She felt almost energized by his question. How would she describe her life's greatest ambition? No one had ever asked it quite like that before. Of course, she could say that she wished to become a Potions Mistress. She could say she hoped to create something new that no one has ever seen before, whether it be a potion or a spell. She could say that she wanted something similar to the bride today- to marry the right person, have children, enjoy financial security. But none of that would really be able to describe her life's ambition.

Severina started to answer slowly but gained fervor with interest in the topic, "I think we often misunderstand what it means to have ambition as a character trait,"

The man arched his eyebrow for her to continue and she did, "I could list all the goals I hope one day to achieve in my life, but I don't think that those goals 'describe' my ambition. They are merely consequences of it. My greatest life ambition is not something that I can ever achieve, because my ambition isn't a goal, it is my driving force forward through life."

"I think, that's why Slytherin ambition is often seen as dangerous because it is not something that can ever find fruition- it can never be satisfied, so it never stops."

"My greatest life ambition, therefore, can only be described as striving to be more than I was yesterday," she had spoken to her water glass and when she paused, she looked up at him.

She could not read his face and there was an expression in his eyes that she could not understand. She wasn't sure why she asked him, but now she was curious, "and you? How would you describe your greatest life ambition?"

That expression in his eyes seemed to flare and his lips twitched in what might have been an attempt to smile.

He answered, "Exactly the same as yours- to be more than I was yesterday, to be more than I am today. Tomorrow will never satisfy me. Just as you said, ambition cannot be satisfied and it cannot be stopped. With every achievement, every goal, there is always another to follow and to strive after. No matter how much power, prestige, influence, wealth, knowledge, it would take more than one lifetime to attain it all."



Severina hummed in understanding. "I suppose then, Death is ambition's only obstacle."

"Exactly." The man said softly but with such surety that Severina wondered if she hadn't spent all dinner conversing with a man who wasn't quite sane.

As soon as dinner cleared and the dancing began, Severina decided that now would be a good time to make an escape. It would certainly be seen as an insult to the bride and groom to leave before they did, but she was starting to feel that coming at all had been a very bad idea.

Hopefully, no one would really notice her absence. Besides, they only ones to have even talked to her, all day, were a twelve-year-old boy and that possibly insane middle-aged man at dinner. Sirius had sent her a wink at one point but had done well enough ignoring her. So did everyone else. Why would they pay attention anyway? She wasn't anything to any of them.

She wondered where James had gone. He had been blowing ridiculous patterns in her neck before dinner. At first, she may have mistaken it as an attempt to be romantic but she quickly realized that he was just bored. So, maybe he was with Sirius now. She had looked up toward Sirius when she first noticed James's absence and saw that he was smiling too much, and stretching ridiculously.

Right now, however, Sirius looked bored and frustrated. So, Severina made her way outside, towards the garden, hoping to lure James out and perhaps make an early escape.

James smirked happily, he couldn't wait to tell Sirius what he'd been up to tonight. After leaving Severina and that old-bore, he went around stealing food, dropping things in drinking glasses, sprinkling sugar on savory dishes and salt on sweet dishes, until he found some hot sauce in the kitchen and watched people get red-faced. Because of the formal event and it being a Malfoy wedding, everyone tried politely not to react when they found something in their drinking glasses, or their food didn't taste quite right, or their tongue caught fire.

So, when James noticed Severina walking outside to the gardens, he wasn't immediately in her vicinity. He had to go out a different door to the gardens to meet her. That was why, when he reached the outdoors, he could only see her from a distance, and the man from dinner coming outside a few moments after.

The man lit a cigarette. James stepped forward and the man must have heard him because his head turned and looked right through him. He sucked in on his cigarette and the light from it reflected in his eyes, making his eyes glow red. James felt frozen in place and could only watch as the man spoke to Severina, but beyond the hiss of muffled speech, James could not understand what was said.

Severina was unnerved to see that the man from dinner had followed her outside, but she schooled herself. He was merely coming out to smoke. He took one drag and through the wisps of grey he offered her his cigarette,

"Smoke?"

Severina's nerves were quite shaken from waiting all day, wondering if her plan of fading into oblivion would work. So, yes she did feel like a smoke. She nodded and took the cigarette, letting the burn in her throat distract her from her nerves. Through the smoke, she caught the man's crystal-blue eyes and for some reason, a memory she had not contemplated in a long time flitted clearly through her mind.

Tobias taught her to smoke when she was four. She was too young to understand whether it was right or wrong. She just knew that when she smoked, it made her dad and his friends laugh. It



wasn't until she turned five and needed to be enrolled in primary school, that she had any hint that it had been wrong. Already at five her voice rasped and scratched. Her mother was worried that her teacher might wonder why a five-year-old child would sound like a forty-year-old smoker. So, Eileen brewed Severina a potion to fix her voice. As soon as Severina drank the potion, her voice was smooth again, richer, and more beautiful than it had been. That was the moment she fell in love with the magic of potions. She had never told anyone that before...

Then she felt it, a foreign presence in her mind. Her magic reacted instinctively, her mind went blank, her magic focused on the foreign presence and push it away from her.

She looked at the man in front of her and passed him back his cigarette. He blinked at her and his expression changed fleetingly. She hadn't really given him a good look at dinner. He looked all at once older and younger than she expected. Which seemed strange but made perfect sense when looking at him. Like he was dancing between the beauty of youth and the beginning sallowness of age.

"Thank you." Severina said to the man and moved to walk around him and back inside. Accepting that she would have to try at another time to make her escape.

The man vanished his cigarette and stopped her genially, "Do you dance, Miss Snape?"

"No, I don't." She said sharply and tried to continue around him.

He grasped her hand, "Then someone really ought to teach you," he said as he pulled her behind him.

Severina considered jerking her hand away but she didn't want to make a scene and draw attention to herself. She decided, one dance and then she would find a way out. Severina wondered briefly if she had seen the man's name on the table or if he had introduced himself at any point.

"Ah, this song is perfect, we can get away with swaying if we must," the man said.

Severina dance stiffly in the stranger's arms and looked over his shoulder at the others in the room. Severina was surprised how quickly fear flooded her nerves, almost like being struck by lightning. The feeling was white-hot and surged up her spine; it made her head lightened and her limbs tingle.

It wasn't that people were looking at them, watching them dance, but who was looking. Mulciber, Rosier, Crabbe, Goyle, Lestrangle, Travers, Black, Avery, Yaxley, Macnair, Dolohov, Carrow, Malfoy... Death Eaters.

"I must say, this is a lovely dress. I'm not sure I've ever seen a prettier. Its beauty is subtle... much like your own."

"Thank you," she answered softly, 'My Lord,' shaking slightly.

The man chuckled high in his sinuses.

"You are trembling, Severina. Are you frightened?"

"Yes, my Lord." She felt a hardness in her throat and tears threatened.

"You weren't afraid a moment ago."

"I was a fool a moment ago," she breathed out.



“But not now?”

“A little wisdom goes a long way.”

“Indeed, I most agree; Lucius did not do you justice, in the least. You were expecting this meeting, were you not?”

“Yes, my Lord.’ She swallowed, ‘I admit, I did not expect it to take place so publicly.”

“Hmm, yes, I had hoped a public setting would you put you at ease, give you a sense of safety.”

Severina huffed shakily, “Am I safer in a public setting?”

He chuckled, “Not at all, but most people prefer to have the illusion anyway. Since you now know who I am, let us begin our interview. I understand that you are interested in joining my ranks. Let me be frank with you, my dear, I see much potential in you. I could see you in my inner circle.”

Severina felt her old ambitions flaring within her and she wished she would have stayed home with James today.

“You’ve been sorely overlooked. For that, I beg your pardon and can only promise to make amends.” He pulled away to look at her and Severina did her best to keep her face expressionless. The Dark Lord smiled and laughed a little. His hand which had rested high on her waist shifted, she felt his knuckles graze her inner forearm as he said almost to himself, ‘I’ll enjoy marking you.”

Severina swallowed down the sick rising in her throat and wondered if there had ever been a way out of this moment.

He seemed disappointed in her lack of reaction and cocked his head slightly, “Would you like that? To receive my Mark? To be in my inner circle? You’d be the first half-blood, the first to rise so high based purely on merit alone. Oh, I know it will not satisfy your ambition, but from this point on, I will see to it that no door is closed to you. Wherever your ambitions lead, you’ll have the support and resources to follow them. I must confess, I... I look forward to seeing all that you will, no doubt, accomplish.”

Her veins felt like they were freezing. Her lips felt dry despite the subtle lipstick Mrs. Potter helped her put on. Remembering the Potters, thinking of James and that future she had imagined for all of them, she said something more Gryffindor than was at all wise at that moment,

“No.”

The Dark Lord stilled, and hissed, “What?”

“I did want to join you, but I have found my own way to follow my ambitions. I am sorry to have wasted your time, my Lord, but I am no longer interested in becoming one of your Death Eaters and you have nothing to offer me that I don’t already have. But I can give you my promise not to join your opposition either. All I ask of you, my Lord...”

But he had stepped away from her and began pacing like a great caged cat. The music stopped and so did the dancers. It was like the room had been put under a stasis charm. The Dark Lord stopped after a moment and looked around,

“Forgive me, please resume,’ and to the musicians, ‘play on.”



They did and Severina was once again dancing with the Dark Lord. He pressed his cheek hard against her temple.

“You still have two years left at Hogwarts?”

“Yes, My Lord.”

“Has Dumbledore approached you yet?”

“Approached me?” Severina asked slowly.

“I’ll take that as a no. He will. He will realize his mistake, as I have. You may be tempted to think me the enemy. You’ll find, it’s not as simple as that- friends and enemies, good and evil, light and dark. You may be tempted to think you can stay neutral. You cannot. You live in this world and this world is at war. You and that boy of yours, under the invisibility cloak, will need to make up your minds. Sooner or later.”

Severina hadn’t realized that she could be any tenser. Now, she wondered if her muscles might snap under the tension.

The Dark Lord sighed heavily through his nose and hissed against her temple, “I’m so very... disappointed.”



## Chapter 19

“Wait, wait, wait...,” Remus waved his hands frantically around in disbelief, “So... how did you get out of there alive?”

The Marauders sat around a campfire in the Forbidden Forest waiting on the last full moon of the summer. It was tradition.

James shook his head, “Honestly after I heard him say that he knew I was there, I thought I was dead for sure. I’m not sure that he didn’t just let us go because it would’ve been rude to kill us at a wedding. He’s... he’s a little nuts.”

Sirius spoke, “Yeah, he’s terrifying but not in the way you might imagine. I was on the other side of the room but it was like... I could feel that he was angry? Or something... but his face was completely calm and emotionless. There was a moment when he started pacing around and I thought for sure he was going to kill Sev.”

“Fuck... then what happened?”

“Well he...”

James spoke, “He went back to dancing with Sev. He said he was disappointed... and then he just kind of... shrugged it off? He said, ‘No matter, a lot can happen in two years.’”

Sirius continued eagerly, “Then he walked Sev around and introduced her to people. When he got to me he kinda, I don’t know, handed her over to me? Like he knew she’d be more comfortable with me. That’s not the weirdest part, though it was creepy that he knew that we’re friends, but my parents... well, they’ve been really nice to me? Like all of a sudden, I’m not just this huge disappointment to them? I’m still weirded out.”

“So, you’re not running away from home anymore?” Peter asked.

Sirius shrugged, “I don’t know. I mean I’m at the Potters right now ‘visiting?’ but my parents were... well I said,

“I’m going to go live with the Potters’

and they just said,

“Enjoy yourself, son.” “Do try to remember to write to us when you receive your OWL results.”

Then I said, “Umm, no...”

“Oh, I’m sure you did fine, but we would like to know in any case.’

“Ummm...K... I don’t believe in blood purity and I think muggle women are attractive.’

“Yes, we know. You’ve told us before.’

“I’m never going to be like you and I’m not going to join your cult of Death Eaters and your Dark Lord.’ That almost got a reaction. My mother’s veins in her neck looked like they might explode but my father said,

“Sirius, son, you are but sixteen-years-old, things will not always be so black and white forever.



Enjoy your visit with your friends. Oh and do tell Miss Snape that our library is open to her, she need only ask.”

“What then?” Remus asked.

Sirius shook his head and shrugged, “Nothing. I left,” he swallowed. Sirius snapped out of his recollection and turned to James excitedly,

“Oh, Prongs! Tell them about the cake!”

“Cake?” Remus asked, confused about what cake had to do with anything.

“Oh, I love cake.” Peter said.

James explained, “After the cake cutting, you know everyone get a piece of cake and well... You-Know-Who gave me his.”

“What?” Peter spurted.

“But he couldn’t see you.” Remus said.

“Well he gave it to Sev. Said, ‘For your invisible boy.’” James explained.

“Weird,” said Peter.

“I don’t know how to feel about this,” remarked Remus.

“Me either,” sighed James.

“Moons coming!” Sirius shouted pointing up at the sky.

The boy whooped and transformed while Remus groaned, said, “Here we go again.”

---

Severina sat at the breakfast table with Mr. and Mrs. Potter. The boys would be stumbling in in a few hours and Severina felt like she was holding her breath until James came back. Like she was itchy all over- not on her skin though, but inside where she’d never reach. She wanted to bite at her nails and pull at her hair, but she remained as calm and collected as she could.

James and Sirius were willing enough to believe that walking out alive was a victory. Oh, why did she have to fall in love with a Gryffindor? She would’ve preferred the Dark Lord had killed them right then and there. Well, not really... but at least she wouldn’t be waiting around for the gavel to fall.

“Is everything alright, Severina?” Mrs. Potter asked.

“Oh, just... our OWL results should be in soon, just hoping I did well.” Severina answered.

“I’m sure you did famously.” Mr. Potter gave her a generous smile and it meant so much more that he didn’t sound like he was trying to ease her nerves so much as stating a fact that he firmly believed in.

Severina loved them more than she had thought herself capable of loving.

The Potters didn’t know about the Dark Lord recruiting her. She had hoped she wouldn’t have



anything to tell. She said she and James were going to a friend's wedding (of course, Gryffindors and Slytherins understand 'friend' differently- Lucius wasn't so much a friend as a resource).

What did the Dark Lord want from her? And why her? Was it just some sort of power-play against Dumbledore? He did seem certain that Dumbledore would approach her... recruit her? Is she going to being the rope these wizards mean to tug in this war of theirs? If that's the case, she wondered if grown wizards ever grow up... and she had so much hope for James.

Thinking of James she smiled. She could use his optimism right now.

---

After sunrise, the real fun began. The Marauders put all thoughts of war and Dark Lords from their minds and focused instead on making their sixth year at Hogwarts, one that no one will ever forget.

The first day of school was rapidly approaching and they could smell it in the air, in the crispness of the breeze and the tinging of the leaves in the trees.

James looked at his friends and soaked in the moment.

After the wedding and Sirius coming to stay with them, Sirius had pulled him aside,

"So how are you doing?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean... How are you and Sev doing? After... I mean it's pretty obvious that You-Know-Who isn't going to take 'no' for an answer. I mean, how are you doing with the fact that the Dark Lord wants your witch, mate?"

James sighed, "I don't know and ugh, don't say it like that. Sev is a stress monster, right now. She needs a bit of cheering up. We are alive right now, and honestly that's all I can focus on."

That's why they stood at the edge of the Forbidden Forest today, facing Hogwarts.

"Now, remember, today is just prep. We'll meet here again the night before school." James said.

"Of course, James." "Right, Prongs." "N-no problem, Prongs."

"Brilliant. Pete you're with me, let's go."

---

"Severina, Love! You have an owl." Mrs. Potter called out.

Severina set down the book with which she was trying, unsuccessfully, to distract herself.

"Coming." She answered and went down to the dining area to where the owls usually came.

An elegant and rare black barn owl, its face accented with reddish-brown feathers, perched on the edge of the table, watched her intently.

"I've tried giving him some food but he seems to be waiting for a reply." Mrs. Potter informed kindly while handing over a letter.

She opened it and nearly dropped it.



*Dear Severina,*

*I must confess I was most impatient to know your OWL results. So, I called in a favor and had yours released early. To say I'm impressed feels like an understatement. With OWL scores like these, you could easily apprentice under any Potioneer you want. It would be an honor, Miss Snape, if you would allow me to write to the Master/Mistress of your choice and begin making arrangements for you. I have instructed my owl to await your reply. Simply write me a name and I'll see to all the details.*

*Eagerly awaiting your reply,*

Instead of a signature, a moving inky mark- a skull with a snake tongue protruding from its opened jaws.

Severina pulled apart the second parchment and it was indeed her OWL scores.

Ancient Runes- O  
Arithmancy- O  
Astronomy- O  
Care of Magical Creatures- O  
Charms- O  
Defense Against the Dark Arts- O  
Herbology- O  
History of Magic- O  
Potions- O  
Transfiguration- O

Severina dropped it on the table and ran her hands through her hair. 10 OWLs... all O's.

The thing was, she would never have done so well in so many subjects if it weren't for the guys. Remus helped her with Ancient Runes and Charms. Sirius helped her with Astronomy and Care of Magical Creatures. James helped her with Transfiguration and well, she was already confident in the other subjects. Even Peter had helped with Herbology and History of Magic.

What the Dark Lord didn't realize, or maybe he did, was that it wasn't herself he had been impressed with, it was all of them together- the pack.

"Oh, are those? Are these your OWL scores?" Mrs. Potter asked, "May I, dearest?"

Severina nodded absentmindedly.

"Oh my goodness... Fleamont, Dear, Severina has received her OWLs, come see!" Mrs. Potter called out excitedly.

Mr. Potter rushed in more quickly than he was likely wise for his age.

The black-barn owl hooted at Severina and her eyes raised slowly, its head cocked looking at her with its big black-eyes that shone like black-marble.

---

"So, Pete, how's your summer been?" James asked once they were alone.

"Good. Not much to tell really. Just helping my mum in the garden mostly... You and Snape are



still doing well it seems?”

“Yeah more than well.”

“When you were talking about the... You-Know-Who, dancing with her and talking to her and wanting her to join him. You weren’t jealous or anything?” Peter asked perplexed.

“Nah. He’s old enough to be her father. Besides, Sev’s my soulmate. If anyone would be jealous it’d be him or anyone else who might fancy her. Severina and I are forever, no worries.”

James smiled at Peter and gave him a reassuring wink but noticed that Peter’s face did something weird.

“You know, Wormtail, you’re one of my best friends. If something’s going on with you... or if something’s bothering you, you can tell me.”

Peter gave him a weak smile, “N-nothing’s wrong. Why ever would you think something was wrong?”

“Well you... Is it Severina? Or something?”

Peter sighed, “It’s just, you used think Lily was your soulmate and now it’s Snape? What if she isn’t, Prongs? What if you’re wrong? What if it’s Lily? I mean... you just met... He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. It’s just... Dumbledore said...”

James stopped what he was doing, “Dumbledore?”

“Never mind.”

“No, Pete please,”

Peter just looked at him and shook his head, “You’ve changed a lot. Ever since you’ve started dating Snape.’ He sighed, ‘I just can’t decide if it’s a good thing or not. Dumbledore said that you would. He said that Lily’s your true soulmate and that Snape would turn you away from the Light and she has, she is... You-Know-Who gave you cake! I mean that’s...”

James laughed, “Look I’m not going to join You-Know-Who and neither is Sev. I don’t care what he said about having to choose sides. We are our own side. We’re a pack and we are strongest together. Right?”

“... right.”

James patted Peter’s shoulder, “That’s right, Wormy! No worries. Now let’s finish swiping Filch’s spare keys. Padfoot and Moony should be done with the fertilizer by now.”

---

“Severina? What’s wrong, dearie? Are these happy tears, Love? Ten O’s... We couldn’t be more proud.” Mrs. Potter held Severina and let her cry into her robes.

“So very proud and you should be proud too, my dear.” Mr. Potter stroked her hair.

Severina took gasping breaths. She thought she was overreacting. It wasn’t like she didn’t expect something like this. It was more like she’d been so tense and on edge since the wedding that seeing *his* mark, snapped some of that tension and it was all releasing now.



She focused on getting control of herself.

“Sorry, yes. I’m fine. I just need to write a reply... is there parchment and ink near?”

The owl was asleep, it’s beak tucked into his chest.

“Yes of course.” Mrs. Potter said and produced said materials from a little desk on the side of the room.

“A reply?” Mr. Potter asked.

Severina didn’t answer immediately, until she’d sat to write, “I’ll explain everything in a moment.”

*My Lord,*

*I cannot accept your offer. I have already made arrangements for an apprenticeship. I can only beg your forgiveness and your mercy. I only mean to not waste anymore of your valuable time by reminding you of what I said before- I have found my own way to follow my ambitions. I am flattered that you have seen potential in me, but so have I and I mean to achieve my goals while staying neutral in this war.*

*Respectfully,  
Severina Snape*

Severina stroked the feathers of the owl and at first, the owl didn’t wake but instead it let out a soft- “whooo.” Mrs. Potter chuckled and tickled its beak until its eyes blinked one eye at a time and ruffled its feathers. Severina held out her letter and watched the owl fly away with it.

She wondered if she just signed all of their death warrants and sent it off to their executioner. Or maybe she was being overdramatic... she sighed and turned to Mr. and Mrs. Potter,

“You should probably sit down.”

---

James returned home with his friends, laughing and joking, planning and dreaming of the school year.

“Mum, Dad, Sev! We’re home!”

Trixie, their aging House-elf, popped up, “Mistresses and Master is being in the dining room. Trixie’s not being sure if they is being happy or sad,” she informed, pulling a little nervously on her ear.

“It’s okay Trixie. We’ll go in and make them happy, no worries.” He winked at her.

“Oh young Master Jamie’s is being the most bestest of young Masters.” Trixie gushed before popping off.

“Even your house-elf spoils you.” Sirius scoffed, ‘Kreacher hates me. He spoils Reggie though. Loves that kid more than mother, even.”

James looked at Sirius sideways, “Well, stay here long enough and Trixie will likely spoil you too if you feel so deprived of house-elf smothering.”

Sirius shrugged and tried to act cool like he didn’t care that Kreacher liked Regulus better than



him, but his cheeks turned a little pink and James stifled a giggle.

When they reached the dining room. The occupants turned to look at them almost simultaneously. Severina was sitting across from his wide-eyed parents looking serious and a little tired. His father looked pale and his mother's hand pressed against her mouth.

The silence carried suspense and tension that he wished he could break, but before he could his mother slowly lowered her hands and said,

“So we've heard you shared a piece of cake with... You-Know-Who.”

James corrected immediately, “and a dinner roll.”

Severina laughed first, her head nearly hitting the table. His mother was next, then his father, then his friends and James was the last to join in. Because, really, what else is left to do when the world is ending and everyone is losing their minds- just laugh.



## Chapter 20

“Why do we have to have a war anyway, man?” Sirius asked, passing the fire whiskey to Peter.

“Right?” Peter burped and handed the bottle to Remus.

“War fucking sucks, dudes. We’re too young to be... dealing with this shit.” Remus hiccuped and passed the bottle to Severina.

“The world’s fucked up and full of fucked up people... I mean maybe Dumbledore and the Dark Lord should just play a fucking game of wizards chess and get it the fuck over with. I haven’t heard either of them give an actual fucking reason for fighting a fucking war. Blood purity? Piss on that. Wizards are as fucked up as muggles.” She said and passed it to James.

“Yeah, Babe! Maybe, maybe they need to just talk it out, man. Peace is groovy! We should all just love each other. Make love not war! Right?”

Severina looked at James hungrily and practically pounced on him. Sirius casually plucked the bottle out of James’s hand which was quickly occupied with burying itself into Snape’s hair.

“What... What is Dumbledore actually fighting for?” Sirius asked.

“Well... you know... not killing muggles and muggle-borns, I think.” Peter said.

“Yeah, a worthy cause, for sure! Killing is stupid. Useless. Wasteful.” Affirmed Remus.

Severina detached herself from James quickly, leaving him dazed while her own eyes were thoughtful though a bit unfocused, “Yeah, okay fine, don’t kill. I can maybe get behind that, but what is the Light fighting for? For maintaining this fucked up system? Like we should be grateful that Dumbledore lets Remus go to school but fuck! He’s not fighting for Remus to be accepted by society. No wonder werewolves and quote-unquote dark creatures are siding with a Dark megalomaniac. Granted, a handsome, charming, good looking, charismatic, like actually gorgeous, intelligent....”

“Oi!” James shouted.

“My point is! The system is fucked up! No wonder we are in the middle of a war, it’s bound to happen when certain people groups are ostracized and oppressed. But the problem is! Neither side gives a good enough solution! They are basically fighting over who gets to choose which group to discriminate against.”

“Whoa, man, that’s deep.” Sirius nodded in agreement.

“What we should do!” James shouted, “What we should do mates, is... shit I lost it.”

“We should all eat cake.” Peter said rubbing his stomach.

“I’m with Wormtail, we should get some cake...” Sirius mumbled.

“Cake later, you fat arses,” Severina slurred, “plans now! We’re a pack, right?”

“Fuck yeah!” Remus said excitedly.

“That’s right, Love! We’re a pack, us five. We start our own goddamned war. War of groovy



loving peace!”

“Yeah, where we can all live in harmony and tolerance for each other!” Said Sirius.

“Not just tolerance... acceptance.” Remus mumbled

“Acceptance.” Slurred Peter in agreement.

Severina spoke, “We’ll be the Grey side. Somewhere between light and dark. Not distinguishing or judging either. Muggleborns should get some sort of early education, I think. Dark creatures... really any being shouldn’t be categorized as such. Gut the whole fucking system, man.”

“Yeah... I’d like that.” Remus said, sleepily falling on Sirius’s shoulder.

Sirius pressed his lips into Remus’s hair and said softly, “I’d like that too.”

Peter was on his back snoring.

“I really think we should...” Severina slurred to James, looking up at him from her spot on his chest, ‘Our pack is more powerful than either of those megalomaniacs put together.’

“That’s right love. We’ll save the world. Together...,” and their eyes all fell heavy into sleep.

A pack, together, dreaming of a better world for them all.



# Chapter 21

## Chapter Notes

I solemnly swear that I will write another Tom/Sev story soon.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Severina sat on the Hogwarts Express in a train compartment with James sleeping on her shoulder. She turned her head and kissed his brow, careful not to disturb the mandrake leaf in her mouth. Sirius and Remus were also sleeping soundly across from them. Peter slept against the window.

They had all disappeared the night before to set up a prank of some sort. James told her before they left, “It’s a surprise for you, Love. You just stay here and relax tonight. You can help with the other ones I promise, but tomorrow is a surprise.”

The trolley witch opened the compartment and Severina held a finger to her lips. The kindly old witch giggled softly and said,

“Anything from the trolley, dear?”

“Yes, five pumpkin pasties, five chocolate frogs, three cauldron cakes, and a licorice wand.”

She and Remus would be full enough on a pumpkin pastie and a chocolate frog, the other three would want a cauldron cake each and Sirius liked licorice wands which Severina didn’t understand but she got it for him anyway.

Severina handed the elderly witch her gallons she exchanged from the muggle money she earned throughout the summer. The Potters insisted on buying her school things, so for once in her life, she had pocket money. The trolley witch placed the snacks on the empty seat beside James and handed Severina one of the pumpkin pasties.

“Thank you,” Severina said softly.

Honestly, she had never been able to afford anything from the trolley before and she was really just excited to be the one to buy them all snacks.

Lily sometimes bought her a chocolate frog or a pastie to share, when they were younger. Severina would be lying if she said she didn’t miss Lily sometimes. What happened to them? Had their friendship been so fragile that a boy could drive such a rift through them?

No. It wasn’t just a boy that drove them apart. It had been a long time coming. Severina believed it had been Lily’s popularity that did it. In Cokeworth, they had both been the odd ones because they were still learning to control their magic. Severina had learned rather early how to control her magic, mostly due to necessity, not wanting to enrage Tobias. So, she had taught Lily.

Severina wondered if they hadn’t only become friends out of the necessity of their proximity and situation.

At the muggle school, in Cokeworth, Petunia had been the popular one. Which always boggled Severina, but Tuny had a knack for knowing how to walk, talk, act in such a way to both blend in



and stand out in the muggle school. Severina never cared but maybe Lily had.

Once they came to Hogwarts, Lily gained popularity quickly. She and Lily were already as proficient with magic, if not more than some of their peers. Lily being muggleborn, it would have appeared much more impressive. It hadn't really bothered Severina before, but thinking about it now, she had taught Lily everything she knew before coming to Hogwarts and it had helped Lily stand out in class. It had made Severina proud before, but now, it kinda made her feel sick.

Lily also, had her own qualities that made her stand out, of course. She was pretty and had a sweetness to her aura. Like Tuny in the muggle school, Lily also seemed to have a knack for fitting in and knowing how to adjust to different social circles. Lily, would almost seem like a different person based on who she was with. Severina could never do that, it was too far from her own nature and to be honest, it sort of disgusted her.

Also, James had liked Lily. James was the most popular boy in their year, if not the school. So, of course, it should follow that the girl he liked should be beautiful and charismatic and popular too, right?

Maybe that's why everyone hated her when James turned his attention to her. She was so different from what everyone expected.

James promised this year would be different.

Severina rested her cheek against his head, still sleeping on her shoulder. She was going to miss sleeping in his arms. She was going to miss how he made love to her. Even when it was more lust than love, he always held her after and he always told her how much he loved her. She never felt so safe and secure than when they were together.

Now they'd be back to stealing moments together.

They weren't going to keep their relationship a secret, though. James was looking forward to rubbing their relationships in everyone's faces.

Severina looked out the window and realized how close to Hogwarts they were. She thought she had better wake the boys.

"James," she said softly, just above a whisper, and ran her fingers through his hair, "Love, wake up, we're almost at Hogwarts."

He groaned and stretched, "Just five more minutes..."

"I got you some snacks from the trolley." She tried.

James just hummed but Peter's nose seemed to start twitching at the mention of food and suddenly sat up.

"Did someone say snacks?"

His eyes almost immediately found the small pile of foodstuff. He dove toward it, disrupting the other two sleeping boys who woke up with a jolt.

Remus stretched and rubbed his eyes.

"What?" Sirius said in an almost normal volume like he hadn't been asleep at all, "Are we there yet? Ooh it that a licorice wand?"



“Yes the stick of tar is for you.” Severina informed.

“Sweet!’ He dove for it and ripped into it, ‘You’re the best Snape, have I mentioned?’”

“Yes, but really there is no need to state the obvious all the time, Black.”

“What did you get me, Love?” James asked finally waking up.

“There are pumpkin pasties and chocolate frogs for each of you, a cauldron cake for you, Peter, and Sirius. Remus, you can have the extra chocolate frog. It was going to be mine but I keep nearly swallowing my mandrake leaf, so I think I’ll do without.”

“I’ll give you a leg,” Remus offered with a wink.

“Deal.” She agreed because Remus wouldn’t feel right eating it otherwise. She probably should have just told him she got him two frogs.

James put his arm around her for the rest of the trip and the boys were nearly vibrating with anticipation once they reached Hogwarts. They held back, purposefully being the last to leave the train.

“Do I at least get a hint?” Severina asked.

“Nope. You’ll find out soon enough.” James said, took her hand and gave it a little squeeze.

As soon as the entrance to Hogwarts appeared, Severina could see the huge double doors were firmly shut. The Gryffindor Head Boy stepped forward and pulled at one of the handles and as soon as he touched the doorknob, the doors separated like a huge mouth and grew teeth. The door’s now enormous jaw of fangs snapped at the Head Boy, who let out a shrill scream of terror, fell on his bum, and scrambled away, all the while still screaming at the octave of a little girl. Once he reached the Head Girl who happened to be a Hufflepuff, he clutched her leg, still trembling.

“Okay, umm...” the Head Girl said, ‘I find this a rather surprising turn of events. Hufflepuff, prefects, to me! We must find another way in!’ then added mater-of-factory, ‘Hufflepuffs are particularly good finders.’”

“What the hell is a Hufflepuff?” Sirius shouted.

Everyone turned to look at him. The Gryffindors sniggered, the Ravenclaws look thoughtful, Slytherins smirked, and the Hufflepuffs shrugged and their prefects walked off to check the other entrances.

Students started sitting down right where they were, all huddled together at the entrance of Hogwarts.

Severina turned to James, “Are the first years able to get in?”

“Yes,’ he said, ‘but they might be waiting to get sorted for some time.’”

The Hufflepuffs returned, and announced,

“The other entrances are the same, all except the Quidditch pitch...”

“Oh excellent!” The Head Girl said.

“Yes, but... it stinks.”



“It smells like... doodie.”

“Duty?”

“No... poop.”

“Shit.” The Head Girl grumbled and then realizing she just cussed threw her hands over her mouth and squeaked.

“She said the magic word...” James murmured.

The door seemed to wobble and groan, its mouth returned but it was moving slowly like it was pinching its animated lips together. Then its lips parted suddenly and its mouth opened wide. Gushing floods of red liquid spewed forth, all over everyone. James, pulled Severina behind him, effectively blocking her from the torrent of red.

The door must have been done vomiting because it let out a huge belch before it turned back into solid wood and swung open.

Severina stepped around to look at James covered, head to toe in red. She reached out and touched the liquid- it was red ink. She tried to cast a cleansing charm on him, cleaning his glasses and clothes but his face and hair were stained red. He smiled widely, his teeth looking brilliantly white against his red face.

“Surprise!” He said, laughing.

Severina chuckled softly, looking around at all the red-faced Hogwarts students. Some only had half their face covered and some had it only in their hair. She alone, it seemed, was spotless.

“Alright everyone, nothing to do about it now. Best foot forward. We have a feast waiting for us!” The Head Girl said and lead the procession into the castle, the Head Boy clinging to the sleeve of her robe.

Once they reached the Great Hall, the Head Girl stopped at the doors, steeled herself, and pulled the doors open without trouble. She took a moment to sigh with relief before she faltered in her step forward with a loud gasp. The Head Boy shrieked again, pitifully and everyone gasped.

The entire Great Hall was upside down. What the Head Girl had been reluctant to step into was the enchanted ceiling which now gave the frightening illusion that she might have fallen into the night sky. Across the room, Severina could make out the professors’ entrance and all the professors waving their wands and scratching their heads.

“How did you do that?” Severina asked James in a whisper.

“Honestly, I have no idea. We were trying to just put the tables upside down and then this happened.” He shrugged.

“So you can’t reverse it?”

“Nope.” He laughed then he looked at her appraisingly, “You’re too clean, looks suspect.”

Then, he pressed his lips to her cheek, leaving a perfect kiss print. He wrapped his arm around her and pulled her into his side.

“This is going to be a good year.” He said confidently while his girlfriend smirked up at him and



his friends doubled over in laughter.

## Chapter End Notes

If you didn't get my StarKid reference: [A Very Potter Musical](#)



## Chapter 22

Severina stood in front of the darkened path. The cold breeze swept through the darkness and sent icy chills through her skin.

“Severina,” came his voice through the darkness. She knew whose voice it was.

“What do you want from me?” She asked desperately.

She stared into the blackness and her eyes strained, sensing something moving toward her from the dark but nothing emerged or took shape. Still, she knew it must be him— the Dark Lord. Her heartbeat rapidly, her pulse pounding in her veins. She wanted to scream, she wanted to shriek but she was frozen.

The breeze turned into a torrent of icy air that cut through her bones and swept through her hair, she could feel it on her neck and freezing her spine. Then it stopped and he stood in front of her. So close she could see the blacks of his eyes— darker even than the path in front of her. So close she could feel his breath on her face— colder than the torrent of icy air that had cut through her. His breath was on her lips, freezing them and his eyes were on her eyes, arresting them.

“You.”

Her eyes opened and she wondered when she had closed them. She sighed into her pillow and sunk into the soft comfort of her bed. Her room at the Potter’s filled with the warm and cheerful sunlight of her happy summer.

Strong arms wrapped around her waist and pulled her back into a solid chest. Severina smiled,

“James,” she murmured, letting love fill her.

She felt his nose nuzzle the hair on the back of her neck and lips press softly into her tresses. Severina chuckled, reaching for the hand that was raking up her ribs. Her fingers reached his. She looked down to raise his knuckles to her lips and violently threw the hand away from her. It wasn’t James’s hand.

A cruel laugh— high and nasal, shook against her back, rattling her ribs. The hand she had thrown away from her, grabbed her shoulder and jerked her onto her back and he looked down at her. He smiled but his eyes were empty and cold, blue as ice.

“No.” Severina gasped out in a choked whimper.

“No?” The Dark Lord repeated smoothly, “No, no, no, no, no.” His lips spread widely, showing all his teeth and his laugh grew louder and dipped into a deep rumble. “Oh, Severina,” he shook his head, “Do you really think I’ll take no for an answer? From you? From anyone?”

His eyes were intense and piercing, there was a wildness growing in them that unsettled her deeply.

“What do you want from me?” She asked shakily.

His hand came up to her face, his fingers brushed across her brow and his nails felt like claws raking against her skin, making her hairs stand on end. When he reached her temple, the pad of his thumb swept over the tender skin there and carried away a tear that had tried to escape. His fingers wrapped around her jaw and his thumb brought her tear to her lips and pressed down firmly,



roughly and Severina wondered at the lack of pain as her lips were forced into her teeth and salt from her tear slipped between her lips.

“What do I want from you?” The Dark Lord asked huskily. “Why should I settle for less than everything? From you or anyone? No one has ever refused me and lived. You and your friends don’t stand a chance against me. Enjoy your time with them while it lasts, Severina,’ He bent his face to the side of hers and spoke into her ear, ‘it won’t be long now. A lot can happen in two years.”

Severina woke, feeling like she was choking. She gasped and sat up. She was surrounded by Slytherin colors, the curtains around her bed were drawn and the green sheets of her bedding were tangled around her legs. She wiped her hand across her eyes and wondered why she wanted to cry.

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James threw his leg over the bench-seat at the Slytherin table so that he was facing Severina. “Morning, Love!” He said as he grabbed a biscuit from her plate. “Have you missed me terribly?”

“I saw you last night before curfew. It’s only been a few hours and I was asleep for most of them.” Severina stated blandly, taking a sip of tea while looking intently at the book she had open on the table.

James was having none of that and leaned forward to nuzzle her neck softly and murmured against her neck, “I missed you. I’ve missed you every night. I always miss you when you’re not with me.”

He felt her sigh and lean into him and he imagined her eyes closing and giving into his words.

“James...” she breathed, “Of course I’ve missed you.” She turned her head so her lips brushed near his ear and whispered, “I miss falling asleep to the sound of your heartbeat and the warmth of your arms.”

James closed his eyes at the smooth sound of her voice and warmth of her breath. He wanted to tell her that he missed her body. He missed how he felt whole and complete when he was inside of her. Gods he missed being inside of her. He missed the feel of her around him, so soft and hot and slick and gods, how she’d moan and cry his name when she...

“Eckhem...” someone cleared their throat beside them.

James and Severina separated and looked over to find several Slytherin stood looking at them, most notably Mulciber, Avery, Rosier, and Regulus Black. There were also a few Slytherin girls... Severina thought they looked off... like they had all used too much hair potion that morning.

Mulciber spoke, “Good morning, Miss Snape, Mr. Potter. We hope you had a pleasant summer.”

James narrowed his eyes and his fist clenched around his wand handle. Severina placed a staying hand on his arm and answered in a polite and formal tone,

“Thank you, Mr. Mulciber, we did indeed have a pleasant summer.”

Avery spoke next, “May I say, Miss Snape, you looked lovely at the Malfoy wedding.”

James raised his eyebrow toward Severina in a silent question- ‘What is going on?’

She ignored him and answered Avery, “Thank you, Mr. Avery.”



Rosier spoke, "We've come to assure, both you and Mr. Potter, that the Slytherin House had nothing to do with last year's most horrific treatment of you, Miss Snape."

"You didn't help stop it either if I remember correctly." James accused.

Severina fought rolling her eyes. She knew that James was not as slow as he seemed at times. The issue here was, he didn't really understand Slytherins. Noninterference is a Slytherin form of "helping." Also, Mulciber didn't refer to their summer and Avery hadn't brought up the wedding just to be polite, they were explaining why they were standing here talking to them at all. The Dark Lord's attention to her at the wedding had changed their tactic and if James could bite his tongue then she might find out what the new tactic was.

Of course, the rest of the Marauders would come over just then, suspecting trouble. Severina observed the strange procession of testosterone-filled posturing with mild fascination.

"What do you lot want?" Sirius asked, crossing his arms and tapping his wand against his bicep.

Remus stood beside him, eyes alert and wand in-hand. Peter stood, eyes darting around at everyone and his hands twitched.

"Calm down dear brother, we are only here to assure Miss Snape of her safety and offer her our assistance if need be." Regulus said.

"She doesn't need you. She has us." James said.

"You can't be around all the time. We have classes with her. Miss Snape will always have an escort and the Slytherin ladies have agreed to dismantle anything malicious in the girls' bathrooms." Avery said while gesturing toward two sixth-year and the seventh-year Slytherin girls who inclined their heads.

"The girls' bathrooms?" James asked with concern looking at Severina.

Severina waved him off. "The gesture is appreciated. I will think about your offer of protection. I suppose you wish to be removed from certain ramifications that the school is currently suffering?"

Mulciber's lips pulled in a flash of a smile but his eyes were hard. Avery pinched his lips and Regulus's nostrils flared a bit and he looked like he was biting on his tongue. The girls bit their cheeks making their lips puff out and cocked their heads.

"It would only be fair." Avery stated.

Severina smiled wickedly, "Of course, because we Slytherins are all about being fair," and huffed in amusement. "You need to work on your ability to negotiate. I'm almost disappointed."

"Watch your mouth, Snape." Mulciber snapped, "You think you can defy our Lord and walk away unscathed, but I say its only a matter of time before..."

James was on his feet, the tip of his wand digging into Mulciber's neck. Black's wand was on Avery's nose and Remus's pointed toward's Regulus' chest. Peter's was out but seemed reluctant to point it at the girls who only looked at him with arched unimpressed eyebrows.

"Before what?" James asked, a warning in his voice.

"Before your Dark Lord tires of Sev's rejections? Bit sad chasing a sixteen-year-old girl, but I suppose if you lot are his alternatives, I can see why he's so desperate." Sirius taunted.



Severina sighed and stood lazily. The gang of Slytherin were taunt and ready to snap.

“How far Slytherin House has fallen,’ Severina said in a mimicry sadness, “is our house not one of ambition and pride? Where have your ambitions gone? Have you none of your own? I denied the Dark Lord because my ambitions are my own and worth more to me than I am willing to sacrifice at the feet of another’s. When will you realize that to follow him is only to feed his own ambition while he sucks the life out of yours?”

Mulciber looked enraged. Avery twitched a little and looked uncertain. Regulus’s eyes drifted down in thought and his brow wrinkled. The girls looked at her like they were seeing her for the first time, which maybe they were because Severina could hardly recall their names, only knowing she’d seen them in classes before.

The owls came in a thrum of beating wings. The gang of Slytherins and the Marauders remained unmoved in their standoff while a black-barn owl landed at Severina’s elbow. It nudged her hand with his head. Severina turned nonchalantly and took the letter from the owl and stroked his feathers. The owl flew off and the gang of Slytherin watched it with their eyes and then at the letter in Severina’s hands.

Severina opened the letter and briefly scanned it. Then she turned it around so the gang could see the Dark Mark on the parchment. She folded the letter again and held it loosely in her fingers, holding it up and chuckled through the tension that grew heavy around them.

“He’ll not have my ambitions. He’ll not have my soul. Those are my own.’ She took a deep sighing breath, ‘Maybe it’s time to start thinking about your own. If you decide you’d rather not sacrifice yours, let us know.”

With that, Severina took James’s elbow and they walked away, the Marauders stayed long enough to stare down the gang of Slytherins. Before following, Sirius turned to his brother and said softly,

“You have other options.”

“What? Like, Dumbledore?” Regulus scoffed.

Sirius regarded his brother and wondered at the hopelessness that flashed through his brother’s eyes. He wanted to pull Reggie into a hug but Regulus had always pushed him away; eventually he had stopped trying.

“No,’ Sirius said, ‘Me and Sev and everyone else who’d rather not fight in other people’s wars.”

Sirius couldn’t help but reach out and squeeze his brother’s shoulder quickly before following his friends.

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“So what did his Darkness want?” James asked Severina, holding her hand through the hall and escorting her to her first class.

“Just... wanted to share his thoughts on a potion that was featured in the Potions Journal this month. Wants to know my thoughts on it as well and says he’s sending me a book, not potions related, says he believes it will be of interest to me and hopes I’ll accept it. He assures me that it is not a courting gift.”

Severina thought about what the Dark Lord had written, how it invoked more curiosity than suspicion,



*As much as I might like to offer it in courtship, I do not think I could bear your rejection in this.*

“Courting gift?” James asked, stopping abruptly in the middle of the hall.

Severina smiled and tried not to laugh. She pulled him to the side.

“It’s just what he calls it. For those, he intends to bring into his inner circle. To take the Dark Mark, it’s a lifetime commitment to him. So, he courts them, sends them gifts, and singles them out. Usually seventh years. He likes to secure them young. At least, that’s what Lucius said.”

James stared at her, “Should I be worried?”

She did laugh then and lifted herself to kiss him gently on his lips, “Never about us. Worried that the Dark Lord will kill us sooner than later? Yes. Worried that Dumbledore will eventually expel you for your pranks? Probably, yes. By the way, why wasn’t I supposed to shower this morning?”

James smirked, “Haven’t you notice? Look around.”

Severina did. Student after student passed by grumbling, their faces twisting in thinly veiled disgust. Everyone was hunched a little, touching their hair self-consciously. Everyone’s faces seemed to be a bit... shiny. Their hair lay flat against their heads with a visible sheen.

“Everyone is,” Severina bit her lip and looked at James with a growing grin, “... greasy.”



## Chapter 23

### Chapter Notes

warning: smut towards the end

Thunder clapped overhead, lightning tore the sky and James held his breath as he watched Severina place the tip of her wand against her heart.

“Amato, Animo, Animato, Animagus.” She said.

She showed no fear and James felt his pride swell. The double heartbeat of her animagus form would be intense and James remembered stomping down his own fear during his first transformation. Mostly, he had been too excited to be very afraid, but watching Severina transform the first time... well, he carried both their fear, he supposed.

Her arms lengthened and she went on all fours. Her body grew fur. Her nose and jaw lengthened, her eyes and ears grew large. Her hands and feet turned to hooves and James’s breath shuddered with soft happy laughter and he smiled so wide his cheeks ached.

A doe.

James shoved his glasses up a little to wipe away the tears that were clouding his vision. She was looking at him with large black eyes, observing his reaction. He stepped toward her and lifted his hand to touch her velvety nose. He wondered if he had ever felt anything so soft. He stroked her ears next and ran his hand down her neck. Her tail twitched like a little flag and James’s heart skipped, thinking that her tail was absolutely the cutest.

“Love, you are the prettiest doe I have ever seen.” He brushed down her back, determined to touch that tail. “Your fur is darker than most, I think. It’s more grey than brown, but the white patches on your nose and stomach,” he brushed down her flanks, to her soft underbelly, “are all the more bright for it.”

He could feel her skin shiver beneath his hand and finally, he reached her tail. She gave out an indignant snort when he explored the soft fur on the underside of her tail—a higher pitch than his stag’s deeper grunts. He chuckled.

Rain started to fall in heavy sheets around them.

James stepped away from her. The rain fogged his glasses and saturated his hair and clothes. Severina’s fur was already darkening. He wanted to run through the rain with her.

James transformed, slipping with natural ease into his hooves, snout and antlers. It would take a few more transformations for Sev to feel comfortable in her new animagus skin.

Seeing her through the eyes of the stag, James was almost surprised by the reaction of his animal form to the sight and smell of her. She was even more beautiful like this. His stag heart thumped heavy and heated blood flooded his veins. His nostrils flared and he breathed deeply her scent which was rich with rain and her proximity.



She approached him first, her nose touching his gently, then stepping more firmly towards him. He dipped his head down slightly so that their noses to their foreheads were pressed together. Their eyes shut gently and they stood there a moment, the rain soaking their fur. Severina took another step, nuzzling his jaw and then his mane, breathing in his scent. Her scent filled him with the most intoxicating desire he had ever felt in his waking moments and made his chest ache with the overwhelming love he held for her.

The stag inside of him wanted to drown in her scent and nuzzled her neck, his eyes closed, letting the world around them fall away leaving only her scent to surround him, the steady sound of her heartbeat, her gentle breaths and the rain that blanketed them. His stag sighed, understanding completeness- “mate.” As though he had found his only reason for existence. Which in a way, for an animal, it was and for James, it was enough and he accepted the understanding.

How overcomplicated humans make things.

James took a few steps away from her and searched the ground for their wands. She watched him with her head tilted to the side, which could only be described as adorable. He picked up the wands gently with his teeth and strutted back and forth in front of her. She shook her head and appeared to be laughing at him. He let out a grunt and beat his hooves against the ground.

“Chase me.” He thought and took off through the forest.

He turned to see if she was following and she bounded up right next to him, leaping over a root and gaining speed. If he could he would have laughed out loud. They were racing but she didn’t know this forest as well as he, so James lead her, almost shepherding her through the forest. The trees grew heavy with rain and they ran through patches of forest where the rain could not reach but where the leaves poured their pools of water on their faces and backs.

The rain exhausted itself to a drizzle and James lead Severina to a small clearing that he had discovered with his friends previously. The rain seemed to have stopped and the clouds were clearing, even though the leaves in the forest rained down from time to time.

James transformed easily and spit their wands into his hands. He heard Severina breathing beside him and he turned to her, she seemed a little uncertain.

“Take a deep breath, changing back is only tricky this first time but it’ll be easier from now on.”

She nodded and took a long deep breath and transformed. James studied her, trying to see if she had any distortions to her features after the animagus transformation. Merlin knew Peter had retained a few rat-like qualities, his front teeth had extended a bit and his mannerisms were even, at times, suspect. Sirius panted when he was hot and he whined and kicked his legs when he dreamed. James’s hair had become more coarse, his eyelashes were fuller and longer and he preferred a more vegetarian diet more often than not. Only time would tell how Severina reacted to her new form but James thought, at first glance, that her eyes looked a little larger and her eyelashes were longer and fuller too.

“That was incredible... I can’t believe it...” Severina said, smiling with wonder.

James pulled her to himself and kissed her, which reminded him...

He dried them with his wand and then turned to the clearing and dried a patch of grass. He removed his shirt and laid it on the ground, transfiguring it into a blanket.

“James,” Sev laughed, “What’s this?”



“Come,” he said taking her hand and leading her to the shirt-turned-blanket, “The stars are perfect here. As long as the clouds clear.”

“A year ago, I would not have believed James Potter to be such a romantic.”

“You love it.” He declared as he stretched out on his back and opened his arms to her.

Severina only chuckled a little and nestled into his arms, resting against his bare torso, and looking up into the sky. The stars were beautiful. The wind currents carried wispy grey clouds through their little clearing, blocking out the bright specks of lights momentarily.

James forgot the stars quickly, turning instead to the witch in his arms, tucked into his side and her hand resting above his heart. He nuzzled his nose into her hair. He thought her hair felt softer, like her velvet nose and the fur he had found on the underside of her tail, and she smelled more richly sweet. Severina tilted her face to his and captured his lips.

He sighed into her kiss and his hands stroked over her shoulder and down her arms, catching her waist and pulling her against him. She pushed against chest, removing herself so she could sit up. James merely crossed his arms behind his head and looked up at her. He loved watching her undress.

No matter how often he saw her bare breasts and the expanse of pale skin along her torso, her stomach, her collarbone, her slender arms, he would ever be in awe. Her breasts were fuller and her ribs were less apparent than they had been when she first moved in with him and his parents. She was healthier, more beautiful, more stunning and she was his— his soul mate.

What an incredible feeling.

She bent down to kiss him again and her soft breasts pressed into his chest. James let his hands wander, feeling the smooth softness of her skin beneath his hands, the gentle slopes of her curves. His hands reached her skirt and his fingers found the clasp after a brief search and he pulled them down, shimmying them over her buttocks and down her thighs and passed the bend of her knees, her calves and finally away from her feet. All the while her own hands found the button of his pants and the zipper and pulled them down, grazing his hardened length and down his thighs.

James stopped her, wrapping his arms around her and lowered her to the ground. He got up and removed his pants himself, turning quickly back to Sev. He kissed her breast, taking a nipple into his mouth and swirling his tongue until her nipple peaked in his mouth and her breathy moans grew desperate. Her thighs squirmed and rubbed together seeking friction. He was pressing himself against her hip but took pity on them both and moved to repositioned himself between her legs. Severina stopped him with a hand on his hip.

“No, James, take these off,” and she tugged at the waistband of his briefs.

James could only nod as he shucked off the last item of clothing and then pulled at hers while she reached for her wand. She cast a contraceptive charm and James was grateful his witch was so sensible, if it were up to him, her womb would be quickening already. He lowered his lips to her stomach just below her bellybutton, thinking— ‘one day.’

He groaned at the scent of her arousal. He lowered his mouth hungrily to her sex to taste her.

“James,” she gasped and moaned, her fingers diving into his hair and her nails scraping gently across his scalp.

He sucked and lapped at her unhurried, letting desire pool and pull deep inside of him. He



hardened and throbbed as she squirmed beneath his lips and he thrust his tongue inside of her. She was hot and soft and absolutely soaking.

“James,” her voice begging and desperate.

He raised his eyes to her looking down at him, her face flushed and her eyes consumed with lust. He sucked in her clit worked it with his tongue, he thrust two fingers inside of her and she threw her head back and let out a long groan. In and out, crooking his fingers the way Sev had patiently taught him over the summer, pulling her towards her orgasm.

“James, I’m close,” she gasped and James sped his pace gradually as not to lose his rhythm, he let his teeth gently graze her clit and her hips jerked, her thighs flexed beside his head and her inner walls clenched around his fingers, “James,” she cried out his name in orgasmic bliss but James was too consumed by his own desire to feel smug. He climbed over and thrust his cock through her clenching walls.

“Fuck,” he gasped and trembled, gently rocking into her, trying to chase her pulsing aftershocks.

James would never get used to how perfect she felt. He would never get used to the feeling of being inside her. Her soft heat was more than lust and love, physical relief, and passion, it was all of those things at once and more. It was everything. Everything worth living for and he never wanted another. It would only be Sev for him, always.

Sev pushed her hips up, encouraging him. His heart laughed. He knew what she wanted; she wanted to feel him come apart. They both enjoyed making the other orgasm almost more than their own release. She pushed against his shoulder and he took the hint, rolling them so he was on his back and she atop him. His impatient minx, but she knew what he liked, he liked when she took control.

She moved her hips, grinding down on him, fitting him deep inside of her. Once she started raising herself and thrusting down hard along his length, he knew he wouldn’t last long. She fucked him mercilessly and all he could do watch as she moved above him, her breast bouncing in rhythm with her moans. He was close but he didn’t want to cum yet, he didn’t know when he’d have her again. He grabbed her hips and thrust up into her, keeping her from pulling up again. He rocked her a little,

“Can you cum again Sev?”

She bit her lip and looked down at him blinking. She was still rocking on him, unconsciously, like she couldn’t stop. She nodded and took his hands in hers, lifting them to her breast. James pinched her nipples gently, absentmindedly massaging them while he watched her fingers begin rubbing circles around her clit. She rocked back and forth, building speed with her hips and her fingers. It didn’t take long but James was enthralled every moment. Soon, she was tensing for the second time, groaning and crying out. James flipped them quickly and fucked her through her second orgasm, finding his own exploding through him, his balls tightening and erupting into her after only a few desperate thrusts.

Coming down from their orgasms, James groaned and rolled them to their sides, keeping them joined as long as he could, and even though he softened, he stayed inside her heat. They kissed lazily, letting their fingers roam over each other’s cooling bodies.

“I love you, James,” Sev whispered to his lips.

“I love you too, Sev,” and he kissed her, holding her body close to his.







## Chapter 24

“So?” Sirius asked James the next day at breakfast.

James grinned. “A doe,” he laughed softly.

Sirius whooped loudly and ruffled James's hair.

“What did he say?” asked Remus excitedly.

Sirius leaned over to Remus and Peter and started singing enthusiastically, “A doe, a deer, a female deer!”

Sirius couldn't continue because he was laughing too hard and Hogwarts must have thought the Marauders had lost their minds in joyous celebration. Remus clapped James on the shoulder and shook him a bit,

“Congratulations, Prongs, that's incredible!”

“A doe? Really? Then that's means...” Peter started.

“True love.” Sirius sighed dramatically feigning a swoon into Remus's lap.

James laughed, “Soulmates! I've been telling you.”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah...” they all groaned. Mildly annoyed by the term by now.

James thought his smile may just be a permanent fixture from now on.

The owls came just as Severina walked through the doors. A black barn owl flew right passed the tables and straight for her, landing carefully in her shoulder, dropping a book into her arms. She stroked a finger under its beak and its feathers ruffled before it nuzzled her cheek and flew off.

James's smile fell at Severina's expression when she looked down at the book in her hands. She was completely enthralled, not even looking up as she walked towards them. James got up and helped her to sit in the midst of the Marauders. It was a little precarious, but he sat behind her, straddling her hips, and rested his chin on her shoulder.

“So what book did his Darkness send you?” He asked, bitterness tinging his voice.

Severina didn't notice and answered in an awed hush, “mind magic,” and her fingertips skimmed over the page. She stiffened in his arms.

“I mean, I'm not sure yet... I've just opened the book, but what if,” she spread her palm over the book, “what if it works in animagus form? What if we could all communicate? I mean, I don't know if it could work like that... but what if?” she asked in excitement at the very thought.

James's smile returned and he chuckled. Ashamed of his momentary jealousy, he squeezed his arms around her. She was still his and he was hers. The Dark Lord had nothing on them, had nothing he could possibly wedge between them.

No one could.

Not even Lily and her attempt to approach him in Herbology.



“Hi, James!”

“Hello, Evans.” He said evenly, noting how his attraction to her was completely gone. In fact, he was almost repulsed by her cloying scent.

“Haven’t had much chance to talk to you. D-did you have a good summer?” She chirped kindly.

He had to smile at that, a bit dreamy, “It was perfect.”

Falling asleep with Severina in his arms and waking in her arms was definitely the highlight of his summer; he couldn’t imagine anything more perfect.

“Oh? What did you do?” Lily asked and James had almost forgotten she was there, his mind wandering to his girlfriend’s naked body.

James cleared his throat, trying not to be aroused during class.

“I spent my summer with Sev. Even introduced her to my parents, they absolutely loved her.” He stated smugly.

“Oh! Uh... wow...” Lily fell silent after that.

James barely noticed Lily at all, anymore, except for when he caught Severina looking at Lily from time to time.

“Is she bothering you?” James asked in Potions after Sev looked over at Lily for the tenth time.

“No...” Severina shook her head and James could’ve sworn she looked disappointed.

“Do you want to talk about it?”

She shook her head again.

“Hey, I know what would cheer you up!” James said.

Sev arched her eyebrow and smirked. She leaned in and whispered in his ear, “I’ve been thinking, we haven’t had shower sex yet. Maybe we should sneak into the quidditch locker room later.”

James forgot what he was about to suggest. It hadn’t had anything to do with sex and he felt rather stupid for that now. Circe’s knickers, his witch was absolutely perfect and James could only nod enthusiastically.

Sev chuckled and pressed a quick kiss to his cheek when he dropped her off at Charms and James’s brain was completely useless for the rest of the day, thinking only of getting Sev naked and wet and pressed up against the shower wall. Maybe he’d take her from behind, her hands pressed against the tile, fingers spread, trying to hold herself in place, her ass up and slapping against him as he...

“Prongs, mate, you coming?” Sirius’s voice cut through his fog of lust.

“Huh?” James asked, blinking quickly.

“Ugh!” Sirius threw up his hands in exasperation and James looked to Remus for help.

“We have a meeting with Peeves?” Remus reminded him patiently.



“Oh, right!”

---

Severina walked down the halls of Hogwarts surrounded by Slytherin girls in her year who had never shown the slightest interest in her previously. Now, they flocked to her whenever they saw an opportunity.

Severina didn't know quite what to do with them.

“Severina, you really must tell us what hair products you have switched to,” said Belvina Burke, who was considered one of the prettiest girls in Slytherin. She had never once spoken to Severina before.

“Err...” Severina answered intelligently, feeling a little off due to the fact that instead of sleeping she had been frolicking in Forbidden Forest with an overly excitable stag.

“Oh yes, please do. Your hair is absolutely gorgeous,” said Antimony Blishwick. Severina thought she might have been paired with her in classes before.

Severina supposed there wasn't too much harm in answering their question. It was a bit shallow, but if they were making an effort, it wouldn't hurt to have allies within her own house.

“Mr. Potter, James's father, invented Sleekezy and he shared the recipe with me over the summer. I was able to adjust the formula to better suit my hair.”

“That's clever,” commented Belvina Flint. Flint had a habit of studying her nails a lot or sticking her nose in the air but never looking people in the eye.

“I always knew you were talented in potions but I hadn't realized you were so innovative as well,” said Gibbon who Severina had only learned her name recently, despite being in the same year and same house. Severina had always thought of her as 'the plump one who wishes she was Burke.'

“Of course she is you nitwit, she's top of the class in Potions.” Said Burke with a roll of her eyes.

“I know that. I was just saying...” Gibbon started sheepishly.

Burke cut her off and turned her attention again to Severina, “So Severina, you and Potter are still going strong. He introduced you to his parents over the summer, too? Sounds like it's getting pretty serious.”

“It is...” Severina said, thinking that maybe humoring them had been a mistake.

“I think it's really romantic, the two of you,” chirped Blishwick.

“So, is it?” asked Flint, her nose in the air and looking at Severina from the corner of her eye.

“Is it what?” asked Severina, wondering what they actually wanted from her.

“I mean there were a lot of rumors going around about the two of you last year. Is it really purely romance or did it start out as something else?” Flint clarified to her fingernails.

“You can tell us.” Burke assured her with a beautiful smile.

Severina wanted to scoff and roll her eyes, but she refrained. They all looked at her expectantly.



“It...” she really didn’t feel like she needed to explain herself to these harpies but, “I love James and he loves me. It’s as simple as that.”

Burke looked surprised and a little impressed. Flint looked bored and disappointed. Blishwick and Gibbon sighed and like she had just regaled them with a story of epic romance.

From then on, the Slytherin girls followed her everywhere. They sat next to her in classes when the guys weren’t there and they even followed her into the bathroom. Severina didn’t understand it at all because only one of them used the toilets while the others gossiped and studied themselves in the mirrors.

It took longer than it should for Severina to realize that she had suddenly become the most popular girl in Slytherin, almost overnight. She hated it.

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“I’m sorry to announce that the courtyard is still off-limits,” Dumbledore informed the student body at dinner, “I’ll remind you, not to try to get through its wards unless you have a particular desire to receive a rather nasty shock. I believe Miss Morgan can attest to the unpleasantness of the experience.”

Dumbledore chuckled a little and smiled down at the unfortunate Ravenclaw seventh-year whose normally straight hair was frizzled and she seemed to be vibrating as she nodded shakily to the Headmaster.

“Also, I am most sorry to inform you all that the Quidditch stands are still being cleaned of fertilizer. So, there will be no spectators allowed during Quidditch matches until further notice. The teams are still able to play since they will be flying above the smell.”

Everyone grumbled.

“You will have the option to sit here in the Great Hall during the matches and listen to our commentator, give us all a play-by-play of the games. Do understand that Mr. Dowson may sound a little funny as he will have to wear a nose plug. That is all. Please enjoy your dinner.”

Severina looked over at James from across the Great Hall (they were able to sit with each other during breakfast and lunch but McGonagall informed them that they had to sit with their houses for dinner). James winked at her. She smiled and shook her head. With a sigh, she turned to her new, “friends” and said,

“Don’t drink the pumpkin juice.”

Gibbon who had hers almost to her lips quickly set it down and pushed it away from her. Just then, a wave of sporadic spewing of pumpkin juice resounded throughout the Great Hall. Even Dumbledore had pumpkin juice dribbling down his long white beard.

Blishwick beamed at her, Flint smirked, Gibbon looked relieved and Burke smiled and inclined her head in satisfaction. Severina just shrugged and made her plate.

“So what’s in the pumpkin juice?” asked Blishwick in an excited whisper.

“Vomit flavoring.”

It hadn’t taken too long to figure out a recipe similar to the Bertie Bott’s flavor, and it had been easy enough to brew. Much more efficient than James’s original idea of sorting out the vomit



flavors from millions of Bertie Bott's assorted beans.

Peeves appeared, hovering over the Great Hall, laughing and chanting, "Puking puky pumpkin puke... hahaha! Puking puky pumpkin puke, hehehehe..."

The subsequent food fight was all Peeves, but when the Bloody Baron was sent for, the ghost simply answered, "No."

Severina decided that she would have to thank the Baron during their next chat.



## Chapter 25

Severina and James's popularity grew like a plague. The Hogwarts student body regarded them like royalty and even though the majority suspected the Marauders behind the school-wide pranks, rather than being upset, everyone was more or less impressed and amused. The general opinion was that this was the best year Hogwarts has seen since the four founders and arguably more exciting and more entertaining. Even though the founding of the school was during a time when muggles were actively hunting down witches and wizards and attempting to burn them at the stake— a fairly enjoyable experience if Wendelin the Weird was to be believed.

Severina's Slytherin 'friends' were primarily responsible for the rapidity of social ascent. The girls spread their tale of romance and true love and the school devoured it.

Popularity hadn't changed Sev in the least. It exhausted her and people's fickleness disgusted her. She wasn't particularly nice to anyone, except for perhaps James and the Marauders. She still watched Peter but if he ever was against her, it seemed that he had now changed sides. He never went off to Dumbledore's office alone and when he went to the kitchens for snacks, he always got everyone's requests right. Peter was the most ardent of James and Severina's 'followers' if such a term could be used.

She still didn't trust Pettigrew. She determined that he was the type who latched on to the powerful and influential like a parasite. She had met enough of his type in her own house to recognize the signs.

She said as much to James as they walked alongside the view of the Black Lake. The obsidian waters reflected blushing leaves, the day was clear, the Lake solid, and she needn't look up to watch the sparse clouds float by.

"What should we do with him then?" James asked as he watched Severina throw Hagrid's rock cakes to the emerging giant squid, who caught each cake with a different tentacle.

Severina threw her last cake, brushed her hands together to remove the remaining crumbs and sighed, "It's a survival instinct, not technically malicious. We never fully trust him, but give him enough to feel like he's protected by association with us and he might prove useful unintentionally."

"I don't understand. How?" James groaned and tossed his last cake as far as he could. The squid snatched it out of the air with a flourish.

Severina chuckled and said, "Well, it's not very Gryffindor so stay with me. Strategically, being able to predict a turn-coat... well, if we ever wanted to communicate to an enemy, but didn't want the enemy to know that we wanted them to know... we could give him important information- false or true- and he would be tempted to see if the information would be worth more to the enemy and therefore gain him more favor with the other side. It's a slimy type of ambition and I'm surprised the sorting hat hadn't recognized it and put him in Slytherin."

"He was a hat stall." James's brow creased in a hard line between his eyes, "We always teased him that it was for Hufflepuff because it was near the kitchens, but he never did say."

"Well, he certainly wouldn't have told you if it were Slytherin."

"Why not?" He sounded affronted.



Sev arched an incredulous eyebrow, “Because you hate Slytherin.”

“I-I don’t.” He pouted his lips, unaware he was doing it.

“You did...” She reminded him.

“Well... I still don’t particularly care for your House in general, but I love you and you’re Slytherin.” James pointed out.

“How astute of you.” Severina retorted evenly.

James bit his tongue and an impish grin spread over his lips. Then his hands darted out and his fingers tickled her ribs. She laughed and shouted at him to stop. Only after he was satisfied that her face had reddened significantly did he stop.

She smacked him in the chest, “How like a Gryffindor to retaliate in a physical attack when faced with a challenge to your intelligence.”

“Yeah? Well, how like a Slytherin to wiggle like a snake under said attack.”

Severina rolled her eyes and tried not to humor his teasing expression.

The autumn air was chilling and James wrapped his arms around her. They stood a moment like that and watched the breeze ripple the surface of the water, the warm hues of the turning leaves distort in the lake’s reflection, and the giant squid’s tentacles gracefully dip below into oblivion.

Severina’s mind turned. Realizing the colors of the leaves linked in her mind to another, she sorted it. Not necessarily disassociating but simply cataloging. She was working through the book the Dark Lord had sent her. Severina found that Occlumency came more naturally to her than Legilimency. Though, both fascinated her to the point of obsession.

She mediated in the morning and before bed at night, letting her mind sift through her dreams and her experiences of the day. It was becoming more and more natural to see her mind form patterns and associations. Then she would catalog and organize her thoughts. Eventually, she would be able to consciously pull at a memory or a bit of information, sort it away again, link it with something else, hide it away.

Severina couldn’t bring herself to hide this one away though. The auburn leaves plagued her with thoughts of Lily. It was their sixth-year and the first she had not started with her former friend.

Severina watched Lily from a distance. She watched Lily’s popularity decline, apparent fair-weather friends abandon her, Professors’ favor in classes slip, and Lily sink into obscurity.

In short, Severina watched Lily lose.

Lily isolated herself from her few true friends. She sat alone at meals, barely talked during class. She dropped from being the top student in their class to being the fifth. She put less effort into her looks. She never wore makeup anymore. She wore her hair in a simple ponytail every day, no longer flipping her beautiful auburn locks when she laughed. Not that it mattered because she never laughed anymore.

“Remus?” Severina finally spoke, as they sat in the Library researching books that Master Belby recommended. They were taking notes to owl back to him.

“Yeah, Sev?” Remus asked while he continued to copy a line from a text.



“Have you talked to Lily?” Severina asked and tried to sound casual but her throat pinched painfully towards the end.

Remus set down his quill carefully and turned to give her his attention. “Yeah, Sev,” he said with a sad nod.

“How,” she started to ask his understanding eyes but had to turn back to the book in front of her, “how is she?”

Remus paused and said carefully, “She asks about you.”

“About me and James?” Severina asked to her inkwell.

“No, about you. I think she misses you,” Remus regarded her sympathetically and added softly, “and, if I may, I think you miss her too.”

Severina did miss Lily. Severina had missed Lily since before their fall-out. She missed the Lily she had met before Hogwarts. She missed the Lily who would steal her away from Spinner’s End and talk with her for hours about everything and nothing. The Lily who split her pumpkin pasties with her on the train and always gave her the bigger half. The Lily, who laughed and teased her out of her darker moods.

Severina missed *her* Lily. Her Lily who never judged her for her clothes or her looks. Her Lily who had been her only friend at their muggle school. Her Lily who took her hand in the park and skipped through the flowers that Severina had magicked for her.

Her Lily who had been her best friend and who just wanted everyone to be happy and to get along. Her Lily who even loved that horrid sister of hers. Her Lily who wouldn’t go out with James because she cared enough that her friend and her potential boyfriend should get along (and how that must have hurt when it blew up in her face). Her Lily who had been so scared when Severina started pulling away from her and started writing to Lucius about the Dark Lord and joining the Death Eaters.

The Lily who laughed at her in the courtyard was not *her* Lily. Severina didn’t know who that was. Her Lily would never do that.

Severina didn’t realize she was crying until Remus wrapped her in his arms and started stroking her back through her sobs.



## Chapter 26

James was surprised that Dumbledore had held out as long as he did.

He thought for sure Dumbledore would crack after they had Peeves swap the school's laundry detergent with itching powder. Or when they released Cornish Pixies into the teacher's lounge.

Transforming the moving staircase into a giant ramp and greasing it, didn't end up being as dangerous as Remus had feared. They made sure to put cushioning charms on the bottom of the stairs and the first and second-years had a lot of fun with it. So, that wasn't the straw that broke the Headmaster's back.

No, it was Halloween.

The strangest thing was, that the events of the Halloween hadn't been the Marauders doing.

Well, the potion laced candies at the feast had been them. There were candies with maximum turbo farts potion, pompano potion (which turned the eater's head into a pumpkin), screaming snakes hair potion (the snakes did not have the ability to turn people into stone, like Medusa's, sadly), and an uglying potion (Severina's own invention, a twist on the beautification potion).

No, those didn't overly upset the Headmaster. In fact, he seemed amused enough when he farted and launched up from his chair several feet.

It was the sudden infestation of boggarts in the castle. James had come across one while walking toward the dungeons with the guys to meet Sev. At first, he thought it had been Severina coming out toward them from behind a tapestry.

He screamed -Sev!- when she turned to face him. Her shirt was ripped open and the word "SLUT" carved into her stomach. The blood trickled out of the letters and when she looked up at him, her neck spurt blood from a deep cut across her throat. James moved to run to her as she collapsed on the ground.

Sirius held James back while Remus stepped up and Severina's bloody body turned into the moon. *Riddikulus* and moon turned into a balloon. James was still pale and shaking, tears streaming down his face as Sirius laughed loudly, no one else could, and with a *whip-crack* the boggart vanished.

They could always count on Sirius to laugh even in the tensest moments. Later Sirius told them, "Grimmauld Place always seems to have boggarts. Reggie was scared of everything when he was a kid- spiders, clowns, flesh-eating slugs, banshee, erkingling,... I had learned to laugh at fear." Sirius shrugged and laughed, "I guess that's why the hat sorted me into Gryffindor."

Severina had looked pale when she finally emerged from her dorm. Her expression could have been mistaken for calm if it didn't look so entirely blank and her eyes lifeless. At first, James feared she might be another boggart. She too looked at him suspiciously for a moment before she ran to him. James caught her in his arms and they held each other, peppering kisses on each other like they might suddenly disappear if they ever stopped.

There were other strange happenings too. Like the courtyard. That hadn't actually been them. They had intended to use Sirius's blizzard charm over it, but even they couldn't get into the courtyard.

And the castle always was cold.



Of course, they weren't responsible for all of Peeves's pranks either. Severina spoke to the Bloody Baron and explained the situation. Whenever asked to scare away Peeves, the ghost answered simply, "No" with no other explanation. So, perhaps Peeve's rampage was a little bit their faults, not that they could really be held accountable for them.

When the Marauders were finally called in by the Headmaster, all their parents were already present and abreast of the prank situation at Hogwarts.

"Now, boys," the Headmaster said firmly, "These pranks have gone too far."

James looked at Dumbledore, unfazed and his righteous anger simmered, "I agree, pranks can often go too far. To think, someone could get hurt? Humiliated? Dehumanized? Forced to say or do things they wouldn't have otherwise? I'm so sorry, Headmaster, that I cannot help you further, to find out who is responsible for such horrible 'pranks' but I can assure you, it was not us. What motive could *we* have? Do you really think we would cause all these terrible things to happen, without apparent cause? Forgive me, sir, but what could have possibly provoked whoever is responsible for all of this?"

"I understand that you are upset about Miss Snape—"

"Oh no!" Mrs. Potter gasped, "has something happened to our dear Severina?"

James tried not to smirk when Dumbledore's eyes widened and turned to the concerned expressions of his parents.

"Severina is doing well, Mum. She's top of our class now!" James announced.

"Headmaster, I simply do not understand why you should think that our boys could possibly be behind these pranks. From what you've just told us, the pranks are excessive. They would have little time to sleep let alone study and James's grades are better than ever." Mr. Potter defended reasonably.

"Indeed, we have also noticed an improvement in Sirius's grades and overall attitude in these few months." Mr. Black stated though Sirius blinked at him because he had not written home at all and while his grades had improved, he wondered how his father found out but suspected his father was straight out lying for some reason.

"And I'm certain Remus would never do anything to intentionally hurt or humiliate others. It's simply not in his nature." Mrs. Lupin said fervently and Mr. Lupin looked at his wife gravely, wrapped his arm around his wife's shoulders and nodded in agreement.

"My Peter would not hurt a fly." Peter's grandmother said sweetly and pinched his reddening cheeks fondly.

"Sev has a theory." Sirius announced carefully, a little off by his father's defense of him.

"Severina is such a smart girl." Mrs. Potter cooed.

Dumbledore sighed and looked like he was getting a headache. He took a lemon drop from his candy dish and popped it in his mouth to give him a moment to fortify himself.

"And what is Miss Snape's theory?" Dumbledore asked.

"Hogwarts Castle is semi-sentient." Remus stated.



“She thinks the castle is d-doing it.” Peter said.

“That Hogwarts itself is upset with its inhabitants, for some reason.” James said.

James had never seen Dumbledore look so furious before. It was all the more frightening for only being a glimpse of fury in his eyes and, in a blink, was gone and replaced by twinkling, indulgent humor.

Dumbledore chuckled, “One of the reasons I so enjoy being Headmaster, is continually learning from my own students never to underestimate the value of their unique perspectives. I will give you boys the benefit of the doubt and as long as your grades continue to improve, I cannot see why any of you should be called into my office again.” He asked with a questioning gaze, as if, just like that he had regained his position over them. “Perhaps I should speak to Miss Snape further about her theory,” and James’s gut felt the threat.



## Chapter 27

"I'm not interested in being your rope." Severina said evenly, after the prolonged silence.

"Rope?" Dumbledore asked with kind amusement.

"In your game of tug-a-war with the Dark Lord." Her eyebrow arched.

The amusement vanished from his face and in its place, simmering righteous anger,

"It's not a game, Miss Snape. People are dying. Voldemort massacres any and all he deems magically impure and does so with relish. I know you are rather sheltered from it here at Hogwarts and that *The Daily Prophet* doesn't cover the worst of it because the Minister has enacted regulations on reports of what is really going on- he believes it best to keep the public from panic. But believe me, Severina, things are not as they seem."

"Then, how it is? Is it black and white, light and dark, or is it greying? Does it really matter who wins as long as people stop dying?"

"Voldemort won't stop. If he wins, there will never be an end."

"And if you win, nothing will change." Severina's eyes were challenging but Dumbledore couldn't reach inside.

Dumbledore's cheeks hollowed like he was sucking on an imaginary lemon drop.

"I don't know what propaganda Voldemort has been feeding you but I know you've been in communication with him- for months now, he's written you frequently. Sometimes once a week, sometimes daily even. Sends you gifts. You're not the only one, you know. He's courting several of your Housemates."

"And how many of them have you brought up here to discuss it?" She asked him.

He didn't answer, only continuing to stare into her eyes as he had been since she entered his office. She felt his magic brushing her occlumency shields and sensed his frustration grow with every wall he ran into, like a mouse put into an unfamiliar maze. She was a puzzle he thought he could solve easily and kept looking for an easy solution, but she was proving to be more complicated than he ever imagined.

"They don't write him back." He countered.

"Neither do I. Not since my first rejection. I send back his gifts."

"Not all of them." His voice was light and questioning, but the accusation was clear.

She sent back the jewelry and the dresses, but not the books. The book on mind magic, dubious potions recipes and theories, and books on dark magic.

Severina and Dumbledore sat in a silent face-off, a type of war in and of itself, trying hard to read each other but both feeling like a child with their first book.

"What is it you want, Miss Snape? What are your... *ambitions* for when you leave Hogwarts?"

It was Severina's turn to mime sucking a lemon drop. She bit down on the inside her cheeks.



Had the Dark Lord not asked her a similar question? Why should her ambitions be of interest to these men, to this war?

Maybe it was because she was a piece on their chessboard, but they didn't know how to move her. She might move unpredictably. She might win their war for them or leave them vulnerable.

Dumbledore was wrong. War is a game. It just has higher stakes than most.

"My ambitions," she answered, "are my own. They are not yours and they are not his. I have no bearing in this war."

"You will not join the Death Eaters?" Dumbledore's eyes bore into hers and Severina wanted to smack her forehead with her palm.

"No. I will not." She answered.

"Will you swear it?" He asked with intensity and she knew he meant a wizard's vow, but surely he didn't mean...

"You want me to..." She was not yet 17... He knew it, of course, and it would be silly to remind him. Besides, he might simply answer, whether aloud or in his silence- *Exactly. You have so much more to lose.*

"If you truly mean what you say, then it shouldn't be an issue," he said.

Severina stood and stared down at Headmaster Dumbledore whose bearded chin tilted up with her movement, his eyes never left her face. Severina looked around at the portraits on the wall- the Headmasters of ages past watched on in rapt attention, but when Severina's eyes turned to them they didn't know where to look. Some had the audacity to pretend to sleep, some looked to each other as if to ask for a second opinion that they were unable to form, and some (particularly Phineas Nigellus Black) were shouting without sound. Severina hadn't realized portraits could be silenced.

Severina's eyes burned and she fought her chin from trembling. That same fear that threatened to overwhelm her while she danced with the Dark Lord, now came back with a vengeance here under the gaze of her Headmaster. The Dark Lord had been right- the illusion of safety in a public place had been comforting, now that she could compare it to the alternative.

The Dark Lord might have charm, power, intelligence, influence, and an ambition that could trample the world, but he didn't have this... this...

Severina swallowed hard through the tightness in her throat and the painful clench of dread. She looked back towards Dumbledore's clear-blue eyes which she had witnessed so often twinkling with kindness and mirth. She saw him now for what he was.

Not an old man slipping into senility. Not a weathered and tired academic. Not even the flamboyant wizard who cared more about candy than school bullies.

No.

What she saw was the Wizard who ruthlessly took down Grindelwald- a wizard arguably a greater threat than the Dark Lord could hope to be. What she saw in Dumbledore's eyes was a wizard with the patience for strategy and in his face was the experience of a warrior who knew what risks to take to win a war.



She had again been a fool.

He knew exactly how she moved and how to move her. He let her talk, let her think she stood on a higher advantage and then lead her exactly where he wanted her.

Could she refuse? Surely if she refused the Dark Lord to his face, she could refuse Dumbledore as well...

Or...

Could she move him?

“Under the condition that I and my friends are free to remain neutral in this war.”

Dumbledore looked tired and shook his head sadly,

“There is no neutral in wars. There are fighters and there are victims. Neutrality is to be a victim, vulnerable on all sides. Victims cannot choose who hurts them, but to fight is to protect what you truly love.”

“I’m not a fighter.”

“Perhaps not, but you have fighters who love you.”

That was the crux of the matter, wasn’t it? It was never about her at all for Dumbledore. This was about his Gryffindor soldiers- about James and the Marauders.

“I don’t want them to fight for me. I don’t want them to fight at all.” Her voice wobbled and cracked. She wasn’t willing to take the risks Dumbledore was willing to take. She had too much to lose.

“You cannot make that choice for them.”

“Neither can you.” She shot back, lowly.

He stared back at her, unmoved.

“I will not join the Dark Lord and I won’t be so stupid as to bind myself irreparably by taking the Dark Mark, but I’ll tell you now- and I hope you’ll be smarter than him to take me at my word the *first* time I tell you- I will not join you and I certainly will not bind myself to an *unbreakable* vow to you or anyone.”

Severina tried not to shiver as Dumbledore’s face shifted- his lips smiled sweetly and his eyes crinkled as if in indulgent laughter. She tried to not feel the tears of frustration fill her vision.

Dumbledore inclined his head and gestured toward the door- her dismissal.

Before she reached the stairs, however,

“Oh, Severina?” Dumbledore called out, “Perhaps you are a fighter after all. I should dust out the Sorting Hat more often,” he chuckled and the Sorting Hat seemed to puff up indignantly.

Severina paused a moment, “Maybe you should stop simplifying people based on their Houses,” she said and left the current Headmaster looking after her, the portraits either gasping, clapping or in Phineas Nigellus Black’s case- smirking proudly.







## Chapter 28

“You have to try to keep me out, James!” Sev snapped.

James squeezed his eyes shut and rubbed his temples, “I’m trying, damn it!” He snapped back.

Remus looked up from the book, “Sev, it says, not everyone can occlude. The fact that you picked it up so fast is rather incredible.”

“If you and Black can at least push me out before letting me see certain memories...” She tried not to blush, remembering what she had seen. However happy she was for Remus and Sirius, it wasn’t the way she would have preferred to find out about their relationship developments.

“Well,’ Remus cleared his throat, a blush rushing to his cheeks, ‘It’s not the same, is it? It’s not like there is anything James wants to keep you from seeing.”

Sirius snorted from Remus’s bed, wrapped around the werewolf and pretending to read over his shoulder.

James sighed, “Look if his Darkness or Dumbledore try to get in my head, at least I’ll know that they are doing it. I know what it feels like.”

Severina shook her head, “Not necessarily. I’m shite at legilimency compared to occlumency and definitely compared to Dumbledore and the Dark Lord. I only felt Dumbledore because he kept finding my walls. When the Dark Lord... I didn’t realize what was happening, my magic just reacted.”

“Well there you go,’ Sirius said with a shrug, ‘you are a natural occlumens. James isn’t.”

Remus perked up, “What if... Well, you are both opposites in many ways and legilimency and occlumency are sort of opposite sides of the same coin. Maybe James should try legilimency.”

James perked up too, “Oh! Like a good defence is a good offence, yeah?”

“Alright,” Severina agreed and they both settled on James’s bed, sitting across from each other, crosslegged, “It’ll be easier if I just pull out a memory for you to see. Try to come out on your own without my having to push you out.”

James nodded and raised his wand but Severina gently pushed it away, “Try wandless first. I just want to see...”

“Alright,” James set his wand down, rolled his shoulders, and took a fortifying breath.

Nothing happened at first. For an entire minute, James stared into her eyes and tried to push his way through, getting more and more frustrated every second. Until he recalled something... It seemed like such a long time ago but it wasn’t even a year ago—the library with Remus when they had found Severina sitting alone. She had let them sit with her and James couldn’t keep his eyes off of her. He had seen her memory of that water-damaged paper... Merlin, he still had that letter. Probably could remember it word for word. But, he had seen it first in her mind—he had slipped through her eyes. She never even knew he was there and he hadn’t even realized or meant to do it.

James smiled.



It wasn't a push; it was a fall. Like falling in love- giving in, letting it happen organically, naturally; not thinking at all about the chance of rejection, but simply holding on to the hope that the fall wouldn't kill you.

If occlumency was a closing off, then legilimency was an opening up.

He was in her mind. That same out-of-body experience, like jumping through time he was standing in the DADA class surrounded by their second-year classmates. He was standing next to a young Severina and Lily. His 12-year old self was duelling with Mulciber in front of the class.

"Expelliarmus!" His younger self shouted and Mulciber's wand ripped from its owner's hand and flew through the air. Young James caught it mid-air.

Sirius was the first to cheer and jumped up to clap James on the shoulder. Soon all the Gryffindors were cheering. Young James was smiling brightly and looked straight at Severina. It was only a moment but it was so clear where James stood that his younger self had sought her eyes first before turning to the redhead next to her. Little Severina's entire face turned pink and she looked quickly away, dropping her chin and letting her hair hide her blush and the small smile on her lips.

James sat on his bed across from Severina and beamed at her, with a barely contained giggle, "Awe, Sev! You've liked me since second-year?"

Severina's eyes widened and her mouth gaped slightly, "I didn't even feel you..."

James laughed, "What can I say? I'm a natural," he winked.

"Told ya!" Sirius said triumphantly and Remus laughed.

The door opened and Peter stepped in.

"What are you all up to?" He asked and then noticing the couples on the beds, 'or do I not want to know?"

"How's, umm... Sally?" James asked, changing the subject.

"She's just gone to get ready for the Yule Ball." Peter announced smugly.

"That's my cue, then. Burke'll have my head if I don't let her do my cosmetic charms. Not that I give a shite, but one less thing for me to do." Severina shrugged and gathered her stuff.

James threw his cloak over her so she wouldn't get caught sneaking out of the boy's dorm, "I'll walk you. Back in a tick, mates."

Once James and Sev reached an alcove where she could de-cloak, she practically jumped him. James was pleasantly surprised by her sudden passion. Usually, it was the other way around, but he certainly wasn't going to complain. He wrapped his arms around her and kept her pressed tightly against him, her hands in his hair holding him close as she kissed him fervently and he did his best to keep up.

He had to break the kiss, panting and dropping his head back a little while she continued to kiss along his jawline and down his neck. Somehow through his lust-fogged thoughts, he wondered,

"Did my legilimency skills turn you on this much?" He asked huskily.

She hummed against his skin, "It's certainly a sexy attribute on you."



"I have lots of those," he smirked smugly.

"This might be my favourite," she admitted huskily, backing off a little and looking up at him.

James was about to say something else when someone cleared their throat on from the hall.

Belvina Flint's bored voice announced, "Snape, you're late and Burke is being a monster. Figured you'd be off snogging Potter somewhere. When you're done in there could you come on already? I'm tired of listening to her bitchin."

Severina blinked. She couldn't remember ever hearing Flint speak so many words consecutively before. The Slytherin girl's rooms must be hell right now. She turned to James and pecked his lips on last time,

"Better be off. Love you."

James's heart stuttered. He would have thought that he would be used to hearing it by now, but there were times like this when it still hit him- how far they had come, in such a short time.

Severina left with Flint and James watched them disappear around the corner. He knew when he saw her next, he would be picking her up for the Ball and James wanted so much to focus on that. They were still so young, but sometimes he felt like he had aged a decade.

Severina's meeting with Dumbledore disturbed him. He was intensely proud of her, but there remained this lingering dread... War raged on and Severina seemed to have been unwittingly thrown into the midst of it. James felt so helpless and powerless at times... The Dark Lord's letters kept coming and his gifts were more and more extravagant.

Dumbledore's eyes watched them more often. He had appeased the castle, suspending three Ravenclaw girls and two of Lily's roommates for the courtyard 'slut' incident. Lily was relieved of prefect duties for knowing about her roommates' involvement and not coming forward sooner.

Lily was a mess. She was miserable. Sev shot Lily sad pitying looks, Lily watched Sev with pathetic longing remorse, and James felt possessive rage watching them.

Funny that.

His Darkness could write Severina letters daily, bordering a lovesick obsession and James felt only a twinge. Sev could spend hours with Remus in the library working on the wolfsbane potion and James might feel heated enough to hunt them down if they lingered too long. Sev didn't care about those Slytherins who trailed after her between classes, so he never felt anything.

But Lily... Lily somehow still held a piece of Severina's heart that not even James could reach and James didn't want to share. Severina used to accuse him of being a spoiled selfish brat, born with a silver spoon in his mouth. Well, it was true. He may have grown up a lot recently because of Sev, but that didn't mean he was without his faults.

So, when he got back to the Gryffindor common room and saw Lily try to slink into her rooms and Alice (her last remaining roommate) stopped her to ask,

"Lily, are you sure you won't come to the Ball tonight? Frank won't mind."

"No. You two have fun. I'll just make an early night of it."

James just smiled and started whistling Christmas carols on his way to his dorm. He had tonight to



look forward to and Sev's eyes would be on him alone with nothing to damper their first Yule Ball together.



## Chapter 29

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“I spiked the punch.” Sirius ‘whispered’ in Severina’s ear and pushed a cup into her hand.

“I didn’t hear that,” Remus mumbled as he took the next proffered cup.

Severina smirked into her first sip and felt eyes on her. She looked up at James who was staring at her with a strange dreamy look in his eyes. She glanced at his cup but it didn’t look like he had taken even a sip yet.

“What is it?” She asked his eyes.

He smiled until his dimples deepened and shook his head softly, “Nothing. I’m just really happy you’re here with me.”

Severina blushed and dipped her head; James wrapped an arm around her and pressed a kiss to her temple. In moments like these, Severina wondered if she had slipped into some dreamscape and simply decided that she liked it better here. If she one day woke up to find that James didn’t love her, never loved her, that it had all been a dream... well, she wouldn’t want to wake up to that. She would rather keep dreaming.

Even with the occasional nightmares.

The Dark Lord’s last letters had hinted at another meeting- always subtle hints, never explicitly said or explained. His words were riddles spanning letter to letter and Severina felt like she was missing the key.

“Hey,’ James nudged her, ‘No sad thoughts tonight, okay?’”

She smiled up at James. She could give him that tonight, she thought.

Regulus’s voice spoke at her side, “Miss Snape, would you honor me with a dance?”

James shot him a fierce glare, “Piss off Black.”

Regulus, however, only looked amused, “I don’t recall asking you.”

Remus held James back before he could lunge at the younger boy. Regulus’s eyes gleamed and Severina watched that gleam vanish when he turned to her. His eyes softened and he leaned into whisper in her ear,

“Please, Severina, I need to speak to you.”

James’s nostrils flared.

“It’s okay James, I’ll be right back,” and assured him with a kiss on his cheek.

Regulus led her to the dance floor and the music changed to a slow waltz. Severina hoped Sirius and Remus could hold James back for a single dance or at least until she found out what this was about.



Regulus pulled her into position but didn't speak, instead, after a few steps he chuckled to himself,

"We always seem to be dancing.' He pulled away to look her in the eye, 'It's almost romantic, don't you think?"

Her hand unconsciously gripped his more tightly and his smile grew.

"Where's Regulus?" She asked, trying to keep her voice from trembling.

"Safely asleep in his bed, I promise, and let us not waste time on threats if you were to inform anyone of my presence here. You are smart enough to know what would happen.' His thumb stroked her fingers as they danced and changed the subject, 'Your dancing has improved."

"James taught me."

He hummed, "Ah yes, your invisible boy,' and looked over to where James was staring them down. 'You'd think he'd *use* his father's hair potion, seeing as it's where his wealth comes from."

She swallowed, not liking at all the reference to the Potters.

"Why are you here?" She diverted.

He smiled brightly and looked into her eyes. She felt him against her occlumency walls and was surprised how clumsy he was compared to Dumbledore and James. Still decidedly more practiced than herself, however, and Severina couldn't help but wonder if he was a natural occlumens like herself. He pulled out of her mind and his smile might have been warm if not for the cold calculation in his eyes.

"I'm glad you liked the book. I knew you would. When I first came across it, I was,' he chuckled softly, 'obsessed- to put it lightly. I hardly slept or ate for weeks. Was it the same for you?" He asked and his eyes searched her face as if he might read her answer before she could speak it.

"Yes," she answered softly, remembering. It had been the same. She hardly slept. She couldn't think about anything else. She had even snapped at James because he kept trying to draw her away- vying for her attention. James always wanted her attention, wanted her to watch him play quidditch, and pouted if he looked over and her nose was in the book instead of watching him. So, she snapped at him- he was being a selfish spoiled brat, needy and whiny, smothering and overbearing. She expected him to fight her, to push her away, to accuse her of being obsessed, of being cold and detached, but he didn't. He simply said- "Teach me, then. If you're going to be obsessed with this, then share it with me. I told you, on the train... I'm afraid you're going to go down a path I can't follow. It's stuff like this... I just don't know how... I just don't want you to leave me behind."

Severina looked over at James. He was still watching, concern etched on his face. He was always so open, his emotions written all over him- his body language, his expressions, his eyes. He was scared. He just didn't want to be left behind. So, she tried to give him a reassuring smile even as the Dark Lord rested his cheek against hers and held her firmly in their dance.

"What do you want from me?" She asked and the question pained her throat.

He didn't answer her but she thought she felt the brush of lips against her skin and a deep inhale like he was trying to breathe her in. He sighed and pulled back a little but his eyes didn't meet hers.

"I wanted to give you your Christmas present in person," he said softly.

The hand that held hers turned and his fingers gave a subtle wave. A new weight settled on her



right index finger; he held her hand between them so she could see the ring- a silver snake with diamond scales and emerald eyes wrapped her finger. He pressed his lips against the ring and Severina fought not to rip her hand away from him.

“Don’t take this off,” he said, examining the ring and then turned his eyes to meet hers, ‘and don’t send it back.” Severina felt the blood drain from her face and she wondered what would happen if she tried.

The Dark Lord wearing Regulus’s face, smiled tightly and asked, ”You were called to Dumbledore’s office. Has he recruited you yet?”

“I told him the same thing I told you,” she answered.

“Not that you would confess otherwise.”

“Certainly not when you are near enough to kill me.”

He looked at her strangely, “I don’t intend to kill you, Severina.’ He smiled a little, ‘It’d be a bad investment” he winked.

“You would. If I got in the way of your ambitions, you would.”

He stared at her a moment, sighed, and drew her closer so he could rest his cheek against hers.

“Yes. I would.’ He nodded against her cheek. ‘Which leaves me to wonder, why you insist on being in the way.”

Severina’s hand was pulled from his and her body molded to James’s familiar side.

“The dance is over,” James said. Severina hadn’t noticed the music changed.

The Dark Lord glared and Severina instinctively held on to James more firmly as if she could protect him if she held him tight enough.

“Thank you for the dance and the present.” Severina said, drawing his attention away from James.

His eyes turned to her, still hard with contained emotion. Then he smiled with a charm that Regulus never possessed, “Happy Christmas, Severina, I best be off lest I turn into a pumpkin or worse,” he smirked. He shot James one more fleeting look before he walked away. James watched him go, with a wrinkled brow and hard eyes, while he held tightly to Severina.

“What the hell was that about?” James murmured.

Severina pulled James to the side.

“Do you have the map?” She hissed.

“Moony has it.”

“Get it quick,” she begged with a gasp.

James blinked in confusion but nodded and went off to where Remus and Sirius were dancing. Severina looked around the room and found Dumbledore chatting happily with McGonagall, his eyes twinkled and his smile held an easy warmth that was kind and charming in a way that made you want to trust him. His eyes glanced in her direction but she looked away.



She feared him more than the Dark Lord, she realized. Had he known the Dark Lord had been here tonight, right under his nose? Was he so easily fooled? Or had he allowed it? Severina didn't understand Dumbledore. The Dark Lord, she understood and she could relate. He was driven by ambition, power, and greed without any structured moral bounds. He was at least predictably unpredictable by his very nature. Dumbledore, however, was more enigmatic and in away she didn't understand at all.

James returned with the map and Remus and Sirius at his heels.

“What's going on Sev?” Remus asked.

“What did my little brother have to say?” asked Sirius.

Severina grabbed the map and hissed the ridiculous key to reveal its contents.

There.

It was only a glimpse at the edge of Hogwarts grounds before it vanished.

*Tom Riddle.*

## Chapter End Notes

Severina's ring





## Chapter 30

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

James stared up at the ceiling of his bedroom. The late-night sky cast silvery light into the room. The weight on his chest crushed him and comforted him all at once.

Severina's sleeping form clung to him. Not that he minded, but her right hand splayed over his chest and the night shone on the diamond snake that wrapped her finger and its emerald eyes taunted him.

They were back home for Christmas break at the Potter estate with his parents and Sirius down the hall. The Lupins were visiting as well. Peter may join them for the New Year. It was Christmas morning and all James could think about was the girl in his arms and wondered why they had to fight so hard for their happiness.

James brushed the back of Severina's hand, causing a gentle wave of goosebumps across her skin. His fingers reached the ring and he gave it a small tug. The silver snake wrapped more tightly and threatened to strangle the finger it held. He stopped and the snake loosened to a more comfortable fit. James turned his head and pressed his lips firmly to Severina's hair.

The first time she tried to remove the ring, she panicked and tore at the ring and tried to rip it off until her finger turned purple and James had to pull her hands away. He expected her to cry, to fall into his arms and weep, but she didn't. She shoved every emotion behind her damned mental wall and stood like a shell of herself. James held her anyway, more for himself—he needed to feel her in his arms. He wept for them both because she wouldn't. Instead, she had said,

“We need to run, James.”

“No,” he had answered, “We'll stay and fight. Together.”

“It's past time to be brave. We need to be smart. We need to be cunning. We need to run. Run as far as we can and never look back and maybe never stop running.”

What a nightmare their Yule Ball had turned out to be and how beautiful it had started, like a perfect dream. Severina had been gorgeous. The sight of her had stolen his breath. Her gown was silver and white and charmed to glitter softly like snowfall. Her hair was done-up elegantly to show off the slender slope of her neck and shoulders which were unobstructed by the thin straps that held the dress. Her makeup had been done in silver tones to match and she looked like a queen.

Her Slytherin “friends” stood by smugly watching him gape at his girlfriend. James had had a hard time swallowing enough to tell her... He wanted to. He wanted to tell her he had never seen anyone so stunningly beautiful and he was stunned. He couldn't keep his eyes off her and she was all the more tempting for not even noticing. She had no idea. She didn't care. She might as well have still been in her school robes, unadorned, hair still lank and greasy.

When they had walked into the Hall, everyone stared. James had noticed “Regulus” long before he approached. He had noticed how the other's eyes had drunk her in and James had instinctually pulled her closer to himself. Severina had looked up at James as if she couldn't believe who stood next to her; as if he were the only man in existence who mattered.

James wished he could have found his voice enough to tell her and somehow explain in a way she



could understand, that he couldn't look at her or even think of her without his heart trying to break from his chest. His love for her was so intense at times, he almost couldn't bear it. Could she ever understand that? Could anyone?

Maybe Sev was right, maybe they should run away together.

There hadn't been any time before they left for Christmas break to find out who Tom Riddle was (besides the obvious) and James's parents said he wasn't of their time. Of course, he would've been after. Mr. Lupin said the name certainly sounded familiar and that there had been a boy with that name who had been Head Boy when Mr. Lupin was in his fourth-year, but that they couldn't possibly be the same person.

No one really knew what to think. Remus and Sirius were as shaken by what happened at the Yule Ball as he was.

"Maybe it's time to go to Dumbledore." Remus suggested.

"Yeah," Sirius said, "maybe it's time to choose a side."

James looked to Severina, "The enemy of our enemy is our friend, right?" but whenever James slipped into Sev's mind, she was still desperate to run. Not that she would ever leave without him and James wouldn't leave without his parents and his friends.

James pulled her sleeping form more firmly to himself and moved his lips to her brow. They hadn't bothered to dress after they had made love that night and her naked skin was hot against his and her soft breasts pillowed into his side. He couldn't lose her, not for anything. The thought of being separated from her caused his body to shake and tears to drip down his temples, hot at first against his skin and cooling quickly by winter's air which permitted the room outside the bed.

Severina stirred and her arms flexed around him. James could feel her soft lips pressing kisses to his chest.

"James?" She asked softly, "are you awake?"

"Can't sleep," he rasped.

"James, I have to tell you and you have to understand, you have to believe... I love you and you are the most important person in the world to me. You matter more than anyone."

James sighed and pressed his cheek to her hair, "I know, Sev."

"Then why are you still pulling at the ring?"

His eyes snapped down and the snake wrapped tightly around her finger and cut painfully into her skin. He snatched his hand away, wrapped her into a fierce embrace and rocked them both moaning,

"I'm sorry... I'm sorry."

She answered soothing, "It's okay James."

"I hate him," he said through gritted teeth.

"Me too."

"What if we can't run away? What if he can track you with that thing?"



Severina sighed wearily, “Other than the bind to keep it from being removed, I’ve only detected protection charms. Mr. Lupin has said the same.”

“If we run, you think he’d not follow you? He called you an investment.” It made James sick. The sick bastard didn’t even see her as a person; to him, she was just some asset to acquire. Maybe they should have just joined the Death Eaters and kept their heads down. Refusing had only made Severina more valuable somehow.

Severina turned her face into his neck and squeezed her arms around him, “I don’t know what else to do to keep you safe,” she said and James felt the pain in her voice.

James sighed. He didn’t know what to do either. Everyone was shaken by the boldness of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named (but whose name was Tom Riddle). His Darkness had backed them into a corner, threatened Severina and Regulus in one fell swoop- scaring the shit out of them all.

James didn’t want to run. He wanted to fight the bastard but that's not what he said. He said,

“Okay, Love, we’ll run.”

Severina sat up and looked down on him, and he wished he could see her face in the dark. The sheet fell with her movement and revealed her silhouette; her bare pale skin shone ever-so softly and James missed her presence in his arms.

“You mean it?” She asked and her voice was cautiously hopeful.

James didn’t like the idea of running, but to hear hope and relief in her voice was enough to solidify the decision. His hand sought hers and when he found it he enlaced their fingers.

“Severina Snape, will you run away with me?”

Severina laughed and brought the palm of his hand to her lips and kissed it.

“I’ve already talked it over with your mother and father. They said they would take care of arrangements and could maybe convince the Lupins to come too. We could leave at the beginning of summer, as soon as school ends. The wolfsbane potion could at least be in a testing phase by then. Sirius might want to try to bring Regulus as well, we could leave sooner, but logistically, there are too many of us.”

It left an uneasy feeling in his gut but her voice was hopeful and he wanted to hold onto that. James smiled, “I have something for you.” He got out of bed, switched on the bedlamp, and fetched the gift from his drawer. When he returned, Severina had lifted the sheet to cover her breasts and he sat on the bed in front of her and offered it to her, “Happy Christmas, Love.”

The shape was obvious, a small box that fit in her palm. She pulled at the twine and unwrapped the velvet box. She lifted the lid and inside sat two thin silver rings shaped like twigs.

“When I told my father that I wanted to give you a promise ring, he took me to our family vault and gave me these. He said its tradition, that he and my mother even wore these before he made his fortune and decided to splurge a little on themselves. Anyway, he said our ancestors were once one of the wealthiest wizarding families, but we had lost our family's ancient fortunes because of these rings. Now each Potter heir adds a little more back into the coffers.’

James cleared his throat.

"Apparently, before we were even called Potter, my ancestor had his inheritance given to his



cousin. Anyway, this ancestor was engaged to be married and he liked her well enough. She was beautiful and wealthy, with a pleasant disposition. Oh, his name was Hadrian.’ James laughed at himself, ‘Sorry I’m muddling this up.’

Severina pecked his cheek, “Keep going.”

“So Hadrian was in the woods one day, trying to catch a glimpse of a unicorn. He thought he might bring back unicorn hair to impress his fiancé or something. When he found the unicorns, he saw a woman there walking among them. She was taking the horns and even though the unicorns didn’t seem bothered, Hadrian confronted her and they argued. She explained that she was harvesting them and that it didn’t hurt the creatures. Hadrian insisted that she should have waited for them to fall off naturally and not have been taking them off. She said they make better potions when the horns are fresh. Thinking that she might have been speaking to a muggle, she was suddenly afraid and ran off. I guess back then, unicorns were more common and even muggles knew about them. Hadrian went back to the woods the next day to try to find the witch again. Dad thinks he wanted to apologize or explain that he wasn’t a muggle, but my great-grandfather believed that Hadrian was drawn to his soulmate.’

James scratched the back of his neck, ‘My Dad said his grandfather believed that our family is either blessed or doomed in meeting their soulmate, but that we always do. Like it's our family curse or something to have soulmates.’ He chuckled

“I’m a curse, then?” Severina asked.

James laughed and took the rings from her hand as he tackled her to the bed and kissed her. She was giggling too much to respond so he trailed kisses down her neck and across her collar bone until she moaned and wiggled under him.

“James,’ she moaned, ‘finish your story.’

“Oh right,’ he cleared his throat and propped himself up on his elbow, looking down at her, and laid the rings on her stomach. ‘So, Hadrian meets her again, but not in the woods. He met her at some family gathering and found out that she was engaged to his cousin. He found out her name was Isolda. Hadrian’s cousin was a bit of a no-good, he fathered a lot of bastards or something and families were reluctant to marry their daughters to him, but Isolda was the fifth of seven girls and not very pretty. So, she was stuck with Hadrian’s disreputable cousin. Hadrian felt sorry for her, but she resented his pity because she didn’t care that she was marrying someone who would be unfaithful. She declared that she didn’t believe in love.”

Severina threaded her fingers through James’s hair at his temples and he leaned into her touch while he continued.

“Hadrian, who hoped to one day love his betrothed as his wife, couldn’t understand someone who didn’t believe in love. He was haunted by dreams of Isolda and couldn’t get her out of his mind. So, he went out to the woods in hopes to see her again and after she found out he was a wizard, she started coming back. He told her he wanted to be her friend and that he knew the woods well and could help her with her gathering.’

James kissed the back of Severina’s hand and laced their fingers together.

“They met nearly every day and eventually, Hadrian realized he was in love with Isolda. He confessed his love to her and begged her to marry him instead of his cousin. Knowing his family would likely disown him if he broke off his engagement and married the plain middle child of a less wealthy family, Isolda convinced him that she did not return his love. Truth was, she had also



fallen in love with him and was only trying to protect him from the shame of loving her.'

James leaned over and kissed Severina's forehead.

"But it was too late for Hadrian. He was in love and he couldn't in good conscience marry his betrothed when he was in love with someone else. He broke off his engagement, which brought shame to the family and they disowned him and gave his inheritance to his cousin, who was his closest male relative. Hadrian comforted himself that at least the woman he loved would have the comforts of life which he had wanted to provide for her. He built for himself a humble cottage in the woods, near the place he first saw Isolda with the unicorns.'

"Isolda didn't know any of this. No one thought to tell her because no one even considered she might be the witch Hadrian had fallen in love with. She found out shortly before she was to be married when her betrothed bragged about the inheritance he acquired from his foolish romantic cousin. After hearing what Hadrian had done, Isolda went to the woods and searched their meeting places for him. She found Hadrian running with unicorn foals. He was dirty and his beard and hair were a mess and his clothes were ragged but he was happy and laughing and free. He spotted her watching him and asked her if she was married yet. She told him she was not. So, he begged her to stay with him because he was convinced that his love could make her happier than any wealth could. Isolda didn't care about the wealth, she had only ever cared about him and so she stayed with him in his little cottage in the woods."

James pulled out the rings and slipped the smaller one onto Severina's left ring finger.

"They didn't have any money or any real wedding ceremony, I don't think. My Dad said they would have been able to do a binding ceremony even without witnesses but they would have needed rings. So, Hadrian transfigured twigs into rings for them, these are those rings."

Severina took the other ring and slipped it on James's left ring finger. She kissed his fingers and felt the cool metal beneath her lips.

"I know it doesn't have any diamond or jewels... I'll get you something a bit nicer..."

"These are perfect, James." Severina insisted. "I don't need anything more than this." She pulled him down into a kiss, hands languidly exploring familiar skin.

James pulled away after a moment, his face pinched.

"What is it?" Severina asked.

"There is a bit more to the story. The cousin... even though he was rich and had other offers of marriage, he never married. It's unclear as to whether he actually loved Isolda or if his pride was just hurt by her abandonment so close to their wedding, but he... he searched for the couple for the rest of his life. He squandered a lot of the inheritance which was eventually given to his younger brother."

"He must not have found them." Severina said.

"No, he did." James spoke in a hush. "Dad didn't say. He said that the couple successfully eluded him, but Sev I... I just have this feeling, I just know he found them." James looked thoughtful.

"But they survived James. They had children and lived happily together. These rings survived generations. He couldn't have found them."

"Maybe they never knew he did, but he found them. He found them happy, poor, and alone in the



woods, but happy because they loved each other. I think he left them alone because you can't inherit or steal happiness like that."

James exhaled softly, laid his cheek on Severina's chest, and wrapped his body around hers. Severina wrapped her arms around James and stroked his hair until he fell asleep. While she lay awake staring at the ceiling with his weight pressing down on her, crushing and comforting her all at once.

## Chapter End Notes





## Chapter 31

Lily Evans watched her sixth year at Hogwarts pass her by with a strange combination of detached numbness and aching pain. It was as if someone else was living her life for her, someone who stopped caring, while the part of her that did care was trapped and forced to watch.

Severina's birthday came and went, the first they hadn't celebrated together, the first year she hadn't gotten Sev a gift. Lily didn't even know what she could've given her. The Marauders had made a big todo about it and the Slytherin girls showered Sev with gifts. Regulus Black too had joined their group since the holidays.

Lily's own birthday came and went. She wondered if Sev had thought about her, and if Sev ever missed her as much as she did.

Everything had changed so much. They had changed so much.

At first, Lily had felt hurt and betrayed, but that was long before Potter came into the mix. When Sev said she was considering joining the Death Eaters, Lily felt it like a stab to her heart. Sev a Death Eater? Death Eaters hate muggle-borns and wouldn't think twice about killing her. They didn't believe people like her should even be allowed to practice magic. Sev, join people who thought that way about her? How could she?

And then Potter?

Lily had hoped James would grow up, that he and Sev would try to get along for her. Lily had let her girlish dreams run wild, starring James Potter, for five years. Lily was angrier at Potter for leading her on, but she would've gotten over it sooner if it hadn't been with Sev. It just felt like they had both chosen each other over her. Had this been going on all along and they were just using her as some buffer for their feelings for each other? Lily just felt so used and it didn't help that everyone around her was feeding all of her suspicions.

It had spiraled so far out of control and Lily hadn't even realized the extent to which it had been targeted at Severina. Not until two of her roommates confessed (or boasted rather) to all that they and a few Ravenclaw girls had done to Sev. The courtyard had been horrifying and Lily had been so stunned. She hadn't meant to laugh, she really hadn't, but everyone else had been laughing and it was so much easier to not think about it being real. Because really, when seeing something so awful happen to someone else, it's hard not to shut down a part of yourself and blend in with the mob.

Lily had been so angry, thinking James and Severina had betrayed her in some way, she didn't realize how she was betraying them. It's a rude awakening to realize you were the one in the wrong, that you had made mistakes in judgment and worse mistakes in behavior. It's a painfully humbling experience to realize you have betrayed your friends and even yourself in the process.

Remus told her Severina wasn't going to join the Death Eaters anymore. He said she even refused You-Know-Who to his face. It was a bitter relief when he had told her and Lily's first thought had been, *Why hadn't I been enough?*

Had it been for James? For Potter? For the boy who bullied her for nearly five years? They had been friends since before Hogwarts, but their friendship hadn't been enough to sway Severina's ambitions.



Sev was happier now, though. You could be blind and see it and if you weren't blind, James and Sev's matching promise rings would have been a dead giveaway.

Why hadn't she been enough to make Sev happy, to keep her out of the Dark?

They had been best friends. Lily had told Sev things she never told anyone. Except she hadn't told Sev about liking James because she knew Sev would be upset. Lily felt like such a fool, now.

Their friendship hadn't been perfect, but it had been real. They had fought before, nothing like this, but Sev could be cruel with her words and Lily could use the silent treatment like a weapon. Sev would usually be the one to apologize whether it was her fault or not. She would say, "Are we still friends, Lily?" And Lily would smile and hug her and answer, "Always."

That's what broke Lily Evans more than guilt or self-pity, that loss of "Always." She knew she needed to beg, to grovel, but she was afraid. She was afraid of the question she would have to ask, "Are we still friends, Sev?" Would Sev answer, "Always?" And what if she didn't? What if she said, "It's too late, Lily. You took me for granted for too long and cared too much for your fragile popularity."

Lily watched Sev and James from afar and wondered how he had done it. How had he gotten her forgiveness?

Gone were the days anyone could think Sev manipulated Potter or that Potter was pranking Severina. The way James looked at Sev sometimes, Lily knew he must have begged for forgiveness and gotten it somehow because he looked at her like he knew he didn't deserve her. He showed it in the way he protected her, defended her, is careful with her like he never wants to ever have to ask for forgiveness again.

On Valentines, Slughorn brought out an amortentia potion for them to identify. Lily breathed in the scent of her grandmother's freshly baked bread, her mother's perfume, and the field of lilies that Severina charmed for her after they both received their Hogwarts letters— their own secret garden to escape the filth of Cokesworth.

*"Will we still be friends at Hogwarts, Lily?"*

*"Of course."*

*"Even if we aren't in the same house?"*

*"We will always be friends, Sev, I promise."*

What happened to always?

Lily looked up at Severina and met her eyes. There was something there- an understanding as if they had just shared in the same memory, but it was gone in a moment.

Potter nuzzled Sev's neck and murmured, "The real thing is better."

Sev blushed crimson and most of the class 'awed" Slughorn laughed, "Ho ho, good observation Mr. Potter. That is because amortentia does not actually simulate love but merely infatuation. Now class..."

Lily put the memory out of her mind until their DADA class, later in the semester. Their DADA professor this year kept confusing his curriculums and they found themselves learning the Patronus charm a year early. No one corrected him because everyone wanted to see if they could produce a



corporeal Patronus and what form it might take.

When the class was asked to give the charm a try, Potter volunteered and his silvery stag strutted around the classroom. He gave Sev a smirk and a wink. Sev rolled her eyes and sighed, then with a confident *Expecto Patronum* her wand shot out a bright light and a doe leaped forth. The stag chased it around the room and the class cheered.

Student after student came forward to make their attempts with varying success. The Mauraders were the only ones to perform it consistently. Lily, when it was her turn, stood shaking in front of the class.

That was when she remembered the amortentia lesson. Lily closed her eyes and remembered running through their small clearing of flowers with Severina. They had chased each other until they were breathless and lay in the grass to rest. They watched the clouds go by and the breeze cooled their skin.

*“We will always be friends, Sev, I promise.”*

Lily held onto that hope, “Expecto Patronum,” and out from her wand burst a silvery-white mist and it took form— a doe.

Lily had tears in her eyes and with hope still fresh in her heart she let it speak,

“Growing up muggle-born, was scary and confusing. My own parents were frightened of me and my own sister called me a freak. I thought something was wrong with me,” her voice cracked but she couldn't stop now that she had started, “but then I met my first witch and it was the first time, I had ever really felt like I belonged. She was my best friend for a long time,” Lily bit her bottom lip hard and tears dripped down her cheeks as she tried to look up at Sev through watery eyes, “but I hurt her, I took her for granted and lost my best friend. I’m so sorry for everything and I just miss her so much.”

Severina’s eyes were just as red as Lily’s and her cheeks just as wet.

Then something incredible happened. Severina stood up. She went to Lily and wrapped her arms around her.

Lily sobbed and clutched her. There was one more thing they both needed to hear and Lily pushed the words through her clenching throat,

“Are we,” she hiccuped, “friends, Sev?”

Severina squeezed her arms more firmly and answered,

“Always.”



## Chapter 32

Having Lily back in her life soothed Severina's soul in a way she hadn't realized she so desperately needed. She was happy with James of course, but losing Lily's friendship in the process had been agonizing.

Severina watched James speed through the sky with the quaffle and as Gryffindor scored another point against Hufflepuff in the championship games, she cheered along with everyone else in the Gryffindor stands. She looked over and Lily smiled beside her— Lily's smile was back and Severina's chest warmed even more.

Lily slipped into life with the Marauders as a natural addition. Remus especially was supportive and Severina wondered at Remus's glue-like function within his strange ever-growing pack. Regulus had a harder time of it than Lily did, but then he joined them after a rather frightening wake up after the Yule ball. Lily got along famously with everyone and everyone was happy to see the girls make up, finally. Everyone except James.

Severina didn't know how to feel about that. A part of her thought maybe James was jealous that Lily now had a claim on Severina's time and attention or maybe he had a harder time forgiving Lily for not being a better friend to her. That was what she wanted to believe. Otherwise, the darker part of herself suspected James was still, at least, attracted to Lily and struggled to be around her. Severina wasn't sure how she would be able to handle that if that was the case.

Maybe this was something like what kept Lily from dating James before. Not necessarily the suspicion that James would be attracted to her, but this tension. The tension was real and disconcerting.

Lily was handling it better than Severina would have in the same position, she knew. Well, before she had learned occlumency. Severina now could shove the feelings away somewhere behind a wall, attach it to some obscure memory, or thought that she would never recall and let it fester and die there hopefully.

Lily grabbed her arm and started jumping up and down cheering. Remus and Peter were also yelling and pumping their fists in the air. The noise of the crowd was piercing and Severina felt yanked from her thoughts as she looked up and saw the Gryffindor quidditch team flying a victory lap overhead.

The Gryffindor stands were already flooding out onto the field below, waiting for the team to land. Severina was hurried out along with them all. She kept looking for James in the sky but every time she caught a glimpse of him, she would lose him again in the chaos.

She couldn't hear anything beyond the roar of the crowd and she tried to smile along with them. It wasn't until they were all on the ground circling the field when Lily turned around and looked at her with concern that Severina realized she wasn't smiling.

Lily's mouth moved, Severina heard no sound, but her lips said, "Sev, what's wrong?"

Severina tried again to smile and shake her head as if to say, "Nothing at all. Everything is perfect and happy and as it should be," but it hurt to lie to herself so much and she pulled Lily into a hug to hide her failing smile.

The quidditch team landed and Severina's attention snapped to Remus who tugged gently at her



elbow. His smile was bright and his eyes were lit with excitement. He jerked his head to the team, his lips moved, "Let's go," but his voice was drowned out in the crowd. Remus helped pull and push their way through the mass of bodies towards the center of the field.

James's familiar arms wrapped her up, pulled her off the ground, and spun her around. His heat and sweat surrounded her. He smelt like an amortentia potion brewed too long and Severina could finally laugh. When he pulled his head back to look at her, Severina could finally smile. James was ecstatic; his laughter and cheers of, "We won! We won!" echoed through him and her.

Severina looked over to Sirius who kissed Remus soundly on the lips while Regulus stood awkwardly waiting to shake his brother's hand. Peter too was cheering madly with everyone else. She scanned the professors and noticed Slughorn and McGonagall smugly taking galleons from a sour-faced Flitwick and Sprout. Dumbledore stood next to them; he looked over the sea of students, his eyes twinkled, he clapped cheerfully with the dignity of a wizard of his years, and his smile was so full of fondness that it made Severina's heart ache and she had to look away. As she did she found Lily's eyes in the crowd. Lily was smiling but her eyes held concern and wariness, while she regarded her friend.

Her plan to run didn't crumble right in front of her, it burst apart with a violent blow. She loved too many people. Cared too much for the fates of those around her. She had too much to fight for.

That frightened her. She was frightened all the time, it seemed, but no more so than she was right at that moment, surrounded by all that she loved. She kept her fear, her insecurities, and her doubts from everyone, especially James but what was she supposed to do?

James was still cheering through all her fears, "We won! We won!"

*I hope so, James, she thought, I truly hope we win in the end.*

She watched James and their friends celebrate. The Gryffindor common room was full to the brim with students drunk on victory and fire whiskey. The noise was nearly unbearable for the snakes who had somehow slithered into this lion's den. Regulus must have felt even more out of place than she did, hanging near her elbow until they had to get back to their dorm.

James collapsed onto a sofa with Sirius, Remus, and Peter in a giggling and sleepy mess. James reached his hand out to her and she slipped her fingers into his clammy hand. His fingers searched her ring-finger and rubbed at the band there. He smiled dopey and Severina chuckled fondly at him.

He slurred but she was pretty sure he asked, "Will you marry me, Sev'rina?"

"Of course, James," she answered softly and leaned over and pecked him on his forehead.

"I love you so mu..." and the next sound that came from him was a soft snore.

Severina looked over to the others who were all sleeping soundly. Sirius and Remus curled into each other and Peter's body lay squashed against the edge, loud snores escaping his gaping mouth.

"Should we move them to their beds?" Regulus asked at her elbow.

"No, leave them here. Serves them right." Severina said with a smirk. She would have to bring them hangover potions in the morning. Let them suffer a little for their Gryffindor brashness.

"Do you want me to walk wi..." Lily started but yawned heavily.



“No it's okay Lily, we'll see you in the morning.”

They said their goodnights but before they left, Severina brushed her fingers through James's messy hair, leaned over, pecked his cheek one last time and whispered into his sleeping ear, “I love you James Potter and I'll do everything in my power to protect you. Whatever it takes.”

With that, she left him dreaming with his friends in the lingering warmth and cheer of their common room. Severina and Regulus walked in companionable silence down to the dungeons of the castle.

Her thumb rubbed at the snake on her finger; it was glamoured so that no one could see it but she could feel the rough patterns of diamonds and the turn of the metal as it wrapped her skin. She would have to go Dumbledore tomorrow, first thing in the morning and beg. Not that she thought it would come to that. He would be happy enough to have his Gryffindor soldiers firmly on his side at last, but that wasn't enough. She needed assurances. She needed to know he would protect them and not sacrifice any of them for the greater good, whatever he imagined that might be. She needed him to know that they weren't pieces in a chess game; their pieces wouldn't magically reassemble at the end of it.

The coolness of the dungeons relieved a little of the burning nerves in her skin. Regulus yawned and rubbed a tired hand over his face and out of the corner of Severina's eye she saw a flash of magic strike him in the back.

Time crawled and Regulus began to fall forward toward the ground. Severina pulled at her wand and twisted her shoulder, snapping backward towards their attacker, but as her arm raised to point her wand, magic struck her in her side, piercing into her ribs and slicing through her heart. The world turned dark and silent; she felt like she was falling into a pit of all her fear. It consumed her in its darkness, pulled her down, and she fell further and further into helplessness.

Thrown into unconscious despair, her mind recalled James's smile and cheers, “*We won! We won!*”

Her fears cried out against it, “*No, James, we lost! We lost...*”

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James ran through the trees. A wolf howled beside him and he looked without fear at the predator at his side. Not a werewolf but a wolf who he knew was Moony. The Grim who was Sirius ran beside him and howled as well. Peter scampered behind them, ducking under the underbrush. On James's other side, his attention snapped to the doe who cut in front of him. His Severina wanted him to chase her.

She turned her elegant neck to look at him and as she did an arrow pierced the air in front of him. The arrow struck his mate in the side and she fell heavily to the ground. Her limp body skid across the forest floor, carried by the momentum she had meant to build into a frolic, but now was stopped-dead by lifeless limbs.

James ran to her and fell to her side on his hands and knees, no longer a stag but a young man kneeling in the dirt. He looked down on the body of the doe in front of him and saw the red-stained hole where her heart would have been, just behind her foreleg.

The silence struck him. He did not scream or cry out. He could not even hear the sound of his heartbeat in his ears. He noticed as well that he could not feel his pulse in his limbs. His body was silent.



He looked down at his chest and where his heart would have been was a hole. Blood ran out from the red-stained spot in his chest and a downpour of rain fell on him. The rain did not wash the blood away but seemed to itself be made of blood instead of water. It poured over his face and he choked on it.

“Potter, damn it, wake up!” Lily’s voice yelled.

James’s eyes snapped open, awake, and soaking wet. His head pounded and he felt groggy.

“What the fuck is going on?” Sirius sputters, shaking the water off of him.

“It’s Sev!” Regulus croaked out and they all look up at a sight that froze them all cold.

Regulus looked out of his mind and Lily didn’t look much better.

“Severina’s gone. We were walking back to our dorm and we had just reached the dungeons... Then I was struck by a spell I think, but then I don’t remember anything else.”

James shot up to his feet and Regulus’s body shook violently and his breaths were uneven, “I woke up in my bed and I couldn’t remember how I got there. I hoped maybe I had dreamt... I asked Severina’s roommates to check on her but they didn’t see her. All her stuff is there. Everything except for her wand. Her bed was made and this was on her pillow.”

Regulus unfolded his clenched fist and held it out to James. There, sitting on his palm was a thin twig-like ring. James plucked the ring up and yes it was the match for his own.

James’s mind went blank and he looked into Regulus’s eyes and without meaning to slipped into the memory that Regulus was practically shoving at him without knowing it. James stood in the hall with Regulus and Severina. Regulus yawned and rubbed at his face. Severina looked thoughtful and there might be fear in her eyes. Then the strike of magic against Regulus’s back.

There was no more. That was it. James wanted to scream- *“No! What happened next? What happened to her?”* but inside of Regulus’s mind, James’s feelings were drowned in the other boy’s. Regulus’s mind sounded like a little boy crying out for his brother, *“Sirius, help me, I’m scared!”*

James came into himself and looked around into the eyes of everyone around him and soaked in the cries of their thoughts. Sirius, *“Oh gods, not again. I can’t even protect my little brother...”* Remus’s growled, *“Sev is one of us— our pack. He’s attacked our pack. You-Know-Who, it was he who took her. It must have been. He wanted her and he’s stolen her from us.”* Peter, *“What’s happened? What’s wrong? What’s going on? Did someone die?”* Lily, *“No, Sev! No, not Sev... not Sev... please let it not be true. Please, let her be okay.”*

Regulus spoke again, “I told Slughorn. He’s gone to tell Dumbledore. I came straight here. I didn’t know what else to do.”

Sirius wrapped his little brother into his arms and rather than being pushed away as he expected, Regulus clung to him and wept openly. Sirius looked to James, they all did, every eye was on him.

“What do we do James?” Remus asked.

He knew his friends were distraught, so was he, but wasn’t it obvious?

“We are going to get her back of course,” James answered, his body shaking with shock, fear, and the cold of being soaking wet with a pounding headache.



“But how?” Lily’s voice begged.

He didn’t know... join Dumbledore, take the Dark Mark, hunt the bastard down who took her and any accomplices then fucking destroy them, burn the whole damn world to the ground...

“We’ll do whatever it takes.” James pointed his wand at Severina’s ring and enlarged it to slip onto his index finger on his right hand.

The portrait opened and in came Dumbledore followed by McGonagall and Slughorn. They viewed the scene in front of them and looked relieved to not have to deliver the bad news, but then their faces twisted with that same question— “What are we to do?”

James’s eyes met Dumbledore’s and he tried to fall through but he fell into a wall. Dumbledore blinked at him and James felt his own mind recall Severina’s voice,

*“We need to run, James.”*

*”No, we’ll stay and fight together.”*

Dumbledore’s confident and understanding voice within James’s mind said, *“I will help you fight, James. I will help you get her back, but you have to trust me.”*

*”Whatever it takes,”* James thought.



## Chapter 33

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Severina felt the warm breeze through her fur. Her ears pricked up and she looked around only to see the whisper of wind rustling the leaves. She breathed in deeply, turning her head to smell the air around her, but smelled only the rich scents of the forest.

She was alone.

*James, she thought, Where's James?*

She walked without direction, lost, and searching. The woods went on and on without a clearing. The trees grew so thick they blocked the sky and Severina wasn't sure whether or not it was night or day.

*Snap.*

Fear washed over her and she looked all around her for the source of the sound. She saw nothing but endless trees. She continued on her way and all the while fear stalked her. Fear led her through the woods, prodding her where it willed, faster and faster until she was galloping as best she could between the trees.

Her heart pumped thick bursts of blood through her veins pounding within her neck and limbs. Her eyes stayed wide and searching and yet she did not see the danger that pursued her or the danger ahead.

Fear blinded her.

The woods grew dark around her as she ran until the darkness swallowed her up and she was fully blind. She could not walk or run, frozen in place by her blindness, surrounded by fear and darkness.

It was cold, so very cold and her skin shivered violently. She cried out in distress forcefully through her nasal passages like a high pitched snort. The sound was involuntary and her mind choked on her desperate plea, *James!*

The air smelled of rot and the cold seeped into her bones. She heard nothing and saw nothing but felt always the presence of fear at her back.

Her eyes widened fruitlessly trying to see in the dark and as she searched the blackness, two glowing red-eyes appeared before her as if just awoken. The eyes hissed and slithered against the forest floor toward her. They raised above her head and she knew the creature was much larger than herself. Still, she could only remain frozen in place as if petrified.

She feared the eyes but she feared more how the eyes did not focus on her but behind her. Her fear was real and the eyes could see it.

She dug into the ground with fingers instead of hooves and instead of soft dirt, she scraped hardwood floor. Gray morning light filtered through the darkness of her dream and once she opened her eyes, she could see the nightmare she woke into.

She was alone as far as she could tell, left in the middle of a dust-covered floor in a decrepit shack.



The wood floor warped as did the walls. The remanence of furnishings and household items sagged with decay and crumbled with rust: a faded wingback chair with a rusty spring where a cushion once was, a wooden table and chair long since without varnishing or protection from termites, and a kitchenette with scattered pots and pans that rusted through.

She hadn't time to stand before the door of the shack creaked open. The door seemed to have opened on its own and for a moment Severina was transfixed on the strap of leather pinned to the other side. It thudded against the movement of the door and seemed to have a face. Then she realized what it was— the carcass of a snake.

Severina scrambled to her feet as a man filled the doorway. She had only seen the Dark Lord once in person, though she met him twice. His appearance juxtaposed the rotting shack so acutely it unsettled her. His hair slicked back neatly without a strand misplaced and his robes fit snug and without a single wrinkle or speck of dirt.

He raised his wand when he saw her and his face filled with fury, but his eyes fell swiftly to the floor below her.

“MOVE!” He shouted as he dropped his wand to the floorboards.

She darted to the side just as the magic ripped through the stale air and blew apart the wood. Severina's arms covered her face instinctively to protect her from the explosion of splinters. She heard his footfalls heavy against the floor and she saw him fall to his knees in front of the hole he had just made. He dug frantically searching for something and screaming,

“No... no, no. Where is it?! NO!”

Severina turned to the open door and sucked in a daring breath before willing her feet to run. Her first two footfalls were drowned out by his shouts of raging frustration but before she could reach the door, she heard him turn and his growl hit her back instead of the ground. Her hands went to the door frame to propel herself through, but arms and hands grabbed, twisted and shoved her hard against the wall.

The impact forced the air from her lungs and she coughed. Dust fell and swirled around them. His face and clothes covered in dust and dirt. His hair fell loose and wild, waving and trying to curl into itself.

“Where is it?” He raged and his breath rushed hot into her face, his eyes crazed and threatening.

“I don't know!” She screamed right back, matching his anger, frustration, and yes even fear. She was absolutely terrified, but so was he. His eyes held fear his anger could not mask.

He tried to push through her mind and rammed against her walls, like a rapid beast trying to claw its way through. Her head pounded with searing pain each time he did it and she fought back against him, pushing him out only for him to dive back in relentlessly. Finally, she pushed him out long enough to slam her eyes shut.

Tears of pain ran from her eyes and she gritted out, “It would be easier if you tell me what you are looking for and I'll drag it out for you!”

His grip tightened around her shoulders and his fingers bit into her flesh, “Where is it?” he snarled.

She didn't know what he was talking about! She didn't know a damn thing! She didn't know where she was or how she got here or who or why or... anything. She didn't know anything!



Her eyes snapped to his, matching his rage and she shook with it, “I DON’T KNOW!” and the decrepit shack trembled with the force of her magic lashing out in her anger and frustration.

Her rage seemed to calm him and he sighed. She was trembling with emotion and he pulled her into his chest. He was cold, stiff, and she found no comfort in his arms even as his hands attempted to rub comforting circles in her back.

His voice dipped in a soothing tone, “Severina, I need you to show me the last thing you remember.”

*Why not?* she thought sardonically. He pulled away, brushed her hair from her face, and lifted her chin to look at him while she let the memory pass her shields. It wasn’t much of a memory, so she showed him and watched all over again her moment of surprise and helplessness. She hadn’t even stood a chance and that bothered her more than anything. Reliving it again made her feel weak, vulnerable, and victimized.

“Were you not wearing your ring?” He asked with a wrinkle pinched between his eyebrows. He lifted her hand and rubbed where the ring curled around her finger. His cheeks hollowed and he released the glamour with a wave of his hands. “You keep it glamourous?” He sounded offended and his mood swings were making her dizzy.

“Well, I can’t take it off.” She snapped back testily.

“Why would you want to take it off? Do you not like it?” His tone reminded her of James somehow. Her heart tore and she wanted to weep.

James... he must be so worried. She needed to get back to him. She felt like there was suddenly a gaping hole in her chest. She sought her promise ring with her thumb and felt only skin. She looked to see it gone.

She would get back to him somehow. She had to be smart. She had to be cunning. She couldn’t show weakness, not until she was back in James’s arms, only then would she cry— then she would weep and cling to him, then she would feel relief. She would not cry now; she could not afford the relief of tears yet.

“That’s impossible... the charms should have protected you.” He looked behind him at the hole in the floor. He spoke softly in a hush, ‘Impossible. Unless... It’s true.’ His hands had returned to hold her arms and his grip tightened involuntarily. Had he not been holding her, his hands would have been fisted. ‘It’s real... the wand.’

Severina slipped her hand in her pocket and her fingers found the familiar smooth surface of her wand. Whoever took her took James’s ring but left her wand. Why?

Whoever took her... Her teeth hurt and she realized she was clenching her jaw. The Dark Lord was looking at her again like she was a puzzle he couldn’t figure out. She certainly sympathized. None of this situation made sense. She was missing too many pieces and she didn’t know where to begin.

Severina’s head spun. She never felt so lost and confused in her life. She had so many questions and she wasn’t sure the Dark Lord had the answers she was looking for.

She could apparate, If he would just let go of her shoulders maybe...

“Why are you here?” He asked mostly to himself.

Severina shook her head. It was a start but it only asked more questions. Why her? Why here? How



long had she been here? She woke up only a moment before he opened the door. Why was he here? Didn't look like a place *anyone* frequented. The timing... could the Dark Lord have brought her here and is acting as if he didn't for some reason? If it was one of his followers, wouldn't they want credit? Wouldn't they still be here? They robbed the Dark Lord of something and left her in its place?

She felt like she was choking... She was only stalling, wasn't she? Trying to avoid her suspicion because he frightened her... Why? Everyone else loves him. The only reason James and the others hadn't joined him yet was because... because of her.

It's always about James for him. Why? She didn't understand him at all. The Dark Lord she could understand. She could understand ruthless ambition. Had he simply stolen her away, she would have easily not questioned a self-serving motive, but Dumbledore... He would have thought this was for the greater good, the right decision. It's not a short-sighted move, it's strategic... but she couldn't see it. Was she just motivation for James and the others to join him or was it something more?"

James... James wouldn't just join him in this war. James would tear the world apart to get her back and she felt like she might burn the world to the ground to get to him. They were soulmates. She felt it now as though her soul was being strained away.

What happens when a soul rips apart? How will the pieces react? Would they lash out in agony and desperation? Would they seek to rejoin or simply give in to the dissent to chaos?

Severina felt a strange calmness come over her. She felt an emptiness that ached acutely, but emptiness carried a stillness that perhaps she mistook for calm. Finally, she looked up at the Dark Lord. His face was expressionless and his eyes were empty and hollow.

*Tom Riddle*, she thought, *his name is Tom Riddle*. She caught the name on her tongue before it could escape, feeling somehow it was more dangerous to speak that name to him than even the name that none dare speak— Lord Voldemort. Who was this man, really?

"You told me once that we would have to choose a side sooner or later. That we would have to make up our minds."

She and James had meant to make their own side but they had underestimated their enemies; too focused on the wrong one, perhaps. They were too young, too ignorant, too naive. Their strengths were only tools for others and their weaknesses were the means to use them.

"It seems we waited too long and our sides have been chosen for us."

How ironic, she might have laughed. She might have been in Dumbledore's office at this moment, negotiating an alliance of some sort against the very wizard who stood before her now.

She had thought to make her own path, but hadn't she known, hadn't she told James? This was always the path she was on, some strange twisted destiny that led her into the dark. She remembered the warmth, love, and joy of the light. She ached for the memory of James's optimistic confidence and the comfort it gave, but now she had been thrown into the darkness, alone and right into the Dark Lord's arms.

He looked over her and through her as if trying to decide what to do with her.

"You asked why I was here. Why are you here?" Severina asked, she didn't actually expect him to answer and was surprised when he did,



“My uncle died,” he answered as if speaking of the weather. “Apparently, Dumbledore had paid him a visit before his death. I came to see if... well...”

Severina followed his eyes to the hole in the floor.

“What did he take from you?” She asked.

“A piece of my soul.” He answered dryly. She wasn’t sure what he meant by it, but he didn’t offer any more explanation.

Her thumb rubbed at the skin on her left ring finger and thought, *me too*.

“You don’t seem overly worried about it anymore.” She remarked.

He laughed, “That particular object has a very nasty curse and compulsion charm on it. Dumbledore will likely die rather quickly and quite painfully.”

His laughter crescendoed. Severina could barely comprehend what he was telling her. He appeared to be distracted enough... He still had her shoulders pinned to the wall, but if she couldn’t apparate alone, she could side-along them to Hogsmead or Diagon Alley, somewhere they would be seen.

He cut his laughter off abruptly and arched an annoyed brow above his cold eyes, “Don’t,” he warned, “Don’t do whatever stupidly brave thing you’re thinking of doing. You’ve been spending too much time with Gryffindors. I hope it hasn’t turned your brain to mush.”

“I was only thinking that if Dumbledore is behind this—”

“Oh, he certainly is. He’s the only one who could.”

“Then he wants me here for some reason. Staying would only be playing into his hands.”

He laughed, “Oh Severina if you were anyone else, I would have already returned your mangled and lifeless corpse as ‘message received.’ As it is, I may have use for you yet.”

“Use for me?” She asked softly, her brow pinching with the question that had plagued her time and time again— what does he want from me? A question she wasn’t sure she wanted to be answered anymore.

He had shown his hand. He would kill her or use her as he willed and then kill her once he had what he wanted. Her fingers warmed the handle of her wand and she squeezed.

Swiftly, she pulled her wand out with a silent *knock back* jinx, but he had felt her arm movement and grabbed her wrist. The errant spell blew the open door off its hinges. The desperate force of the spell ripped the stiff withered body of the snake from the nail and the door fell on its side with a crash and the wood cracked down its center. The Dark Lord pressed Severina's body painfully against the wall as he gathered her wrists into a single-fisted hold. Severina held tight to her wand.

*Diagon Alley* she deliberated and with a crack like a whip she pulled them away. They stumbled when they arrived, now without a wall behind her to press into. The Dark Lord still had hold of her wrists and she made to scream, searching frantically for someone who might hear, but his free hand struck out to her neck and squeezed, bruising her esophagus.

The sun was still rising, it was too early in the morning and the Alley was deserted. Hope crumbled like a rock in a giant’s crushing grip and blew away like dust in the breeze.



*I'm so sorry, James, she thought, I tried... gods I'm such a fool.*

The Dark Lord disappeared them with an angry growl. Once the world stopped spinning, he wrenched her wand from her hand. Then he hissed something and yanked the diamond snake from her finger. He threw her to the ground and stood over her holding her wand in one hand and his pointed at her chest.

She heard him hiss again but this time as if spitting venom, *Crucio*. The pain was greater than anything she had ever felt. Intense and all-consuming, she lost herself in the pain... she was being skinned alive with searing blades over every inch of her and her head felt like it might combust with the pressure of the pain. She screamed and screamed and her screams felt like fire spewing from her lungs.

Then it stopped. She whimpered and curled into the dirt, begging it to swallow her up. She sensed the Dark Lord lower himself beside her. He sighed and brushed his fingers through her hair, gently with his fingertips and then stroked down her teary cheeks with the back of his knuckles.

"Now look what you made me do," he said regretfully.

Every muscle in her body seized up and she could not reply. Her eyes clamped shut and her face turned into the dirt. She could only listen.

"You can have this back when you've earned it," he informed her like a teacher who had confiscated toy from an unruly child.

Her eyes didn't want to open and she could only wonder if he meant her wand or his ring. Likely both...

"Do you remember when we first met?" He asked and petted her hair again, 'I do. I remember it... constantly. You were lovely, enchanting in a way that cannot be learned, and all the more charming for being completely oblivious to your appeal. You have so much potential, Severina, ambitiously intelligent, naturally gifted, and innately powerful. I had such hopes for you... and then you said, 'no.'"

His hand left her hair and moved to massage the cramping muscles in her neck and shoulders.

"You didn't just say no. You didn't just refuse my offer... you denied me publicly in front of my Death Eaters. You cannot comprehend the trouble you have caused me with that 'no.' I should have killed you then. Do you want to know why I didn't? Hmm?"

He squeezed her neck one more time as if in emphasis and moved his hand to tilt her chin out of the dirt. She forced her eyes to blink open. His face was full of an emotion that did not quite fit... like he was trying to imitate empathy.

"I didn't kill you or your boy or his parents or your friends... I could have, but I didn't and what thanks do I get? More rejections, gifts sent back, letter after letter with only silence as your response, and yet I let you live.'

He helped her sit up and turned her so that he was sitting behind her. They were sitting in the soil of a garden bed at the back of a manor house. He continued to rub her spasming muscles. It hurt significantly every time he touched her but after the cruciatus curse she was desperate enough for relief and too weak to fight.

"You live because to kill you now would be such a waste. I see your potential, Severina; I see it clearly. So, why did Dumbledore send you to me? I must wonder if he is foolish enough not to see



your potential as I do, but no. If that were the case, then he would have simply overlooked you not thrown you into my lap.'

He spoke the last words next to her ear with a chuckle. He moved to her hand and forced her fingers to open and massaged her palm and fingers.

"So then he must see it and realized that your potential is not for his benefit. He didn't have adequate means to turn you to his side and he didn't have the stomach to kill you himself in cold blood. You see, he'll prefer to fight you on a battlefield and he'll prefer someone else to do it. Not so very brave, in my opinion.'

He kissed the back of her hand, stood and stretched. His hands brushed at his hair to slick it back but a lock of hair refused and curled across his forehead. He cocked his head to the side and smiled charmingly.

"Perhaps it will be your invisible boy. Wouldn't that be poetic? Wouldn't that be the height of romantic tragedy to have the one you love, be the one to stop your heart?"

His proffered his hand and she glanced at it without moving to take it. He clicked his tongue and sighed with impatience. He sat on his haunches in front of her and pinched her chin, holding her in his gaze.

"My dear Severina, you haven't many choices. You can submit to me willingly and I will teach you such things... you will have more power and knowledge than you could dream of. I'll see to it that your potential is not just met but excelled.'

His thumb caressed her chin and jaw.

"Or... you can keep trying to run, keep resisting, keep fighting me and I'll see to it that you die slowly and painfully, but I'll have what I want from you either way."

He released her chin and took both her hands in his, "So what will it be Severina?"

"W—wh-what..." the effort of speech burned her raw throat.

He leaned in and tilted his ear towards her, "Hmm? What is it, I can't hear you. You'll have to speak up."

"What do y-you...want fr-from me?" Fresh tears fell as she met his eyes as impassively as she could, drained of hope and numbed by fear and emptiness.

The Dark Lord grinned as if pleased by her question. He squeezed her hands gently and pulled her to her feet. Her legs didn't respond at first and he shifted an arm around her back and the other behind her knees and lifted her into his arms. He looked down at her with his pleased smile as he carried her toward the manor house.

"Tell me, Severina, how would you like to learn alchemy?"

## Chapter End Notes

I had to rewrite this chapter several times. Tom is the most difficult character to write in this story! He is an unpredictable combination of creepy, charming, infatuated, self-



serving, intelligent, ambitious, powerful, evil, romantic, and crazy... It's a difficult balance to maintain.



## Chapter 34

James reached for Severina only to feel cold empty sheets beneath his fingertips. He clutched his hand around them and felt the clenching pain of loss rise and swell to his throat. He pulled her pillow to his chest and wondered how many more times he could weep before his heart simply gave up on him.

Her absence was like a gaping hole in the middle of his chest. Like a phantom limb, his soul tried to pulse with life only to find it missed a vital piece of itself. James could not imagine a pain greater than this.

He hated that bastard. Hated him for stealing her away, but as much as he hated Tom Riddle, he hated himself a thousand times more. He failed her again. He wasn't there when she needed him. Getting drunk over a Quidditch match, a fucking Quidditch match! He should've been there!

The Aurors had one lead the morning after she was taken. A Diagon Alley shop keeper who lived above her shop had heard some commotion in the Alley and looked out her window. The shop keeper said she saw a wizard and a witch grappling over a wand, the witch looked to be wearing Hogwarts robes and they both had dark hair, but that was the extent of description she was able to give. She said they disappeared out quickly and it had only been a glimpse. The reason she called the Aurors and the reason James woke up most nights was that the witness said she could clearly see the wizard's hand around the witch's neck.

James choked on air, sobbing. Was she okay? Was he hurting her? Oh, gods... was he? What if he was...

The door to his room creaked open and the soft light of a *lumos* filled the doorway.

"James?" Remus asked softly. The Lupins came to stay the summer with the Potters and Remus would listen to James cry himself to sleep and then wake up and cry again. During the day James would be single-minded and focused on getting Severina back but when at the end of every day she was still gone, James fell into despair. Remus's heart broke for him.

James sat up on his bed but only whimpered pitifully in answer to his friend. Tears still filled his eyes and he hurt too much to open them, but he felt the bed next to him give under the other's weight and an arm wrap around his shoulders.

Remus spoke with tears in his voice, "I cast a privacy charm." He squeezed his shoulders, 'just let it out, James.'

Permission to cry and ironically all it did was calm him. He wished he could. He wished he could let it out and be better, but the problem with crying and the problem with this whole situation was that Severina was gone and *He* had her!

"Remus, what if he's... what if he's forcing himself on her? What if he's torturing her or I don't know... I don't know... I just can't stop thinking about all these horrible things. Every night, I can't sleep because every time I close my eyes my mind runs through all the worse possible things he could be doing to her.'

James clutched his head, "No one has seen her since the first morning she'd been missing. The shop keeper... she said she saw a man with his hand around a Slytherin student's neck. She was fighting him, she was trying to get away. What if he's hurting her?"



“Why would he take her just to hurt her?” Remus asked wondering at the possibility himself.

“Because she said ‘no’ to him, because she rejected him? It would have been more merciful had he killed us both at the wedding rather than this. Remus, it hurts. I can’t explain it... It feels like he ripped my heart out and it keeps trying to beat but instead of life, it pumps... pain. It’s been torture every day since she’s been gone. Do you think she’s suffering like this too?”

Remus was silent for a moment before he answered, “Severina is excellent at occlumency. I think she’s already further along than many could achieve in a lifetime. I’m sure she feels just the same, but maybe she can shield herself from it better. Do you... can you tell... that is... would you know if she’s... if she’s still alive?”

James swallowed and shook the possibility from his mind, “If she wasn’t, I think I’d just feel empty. It’s more like I feel strained. Like I’m being stretched further than I can bear. I feel restless and useless and it’s driving me mad.”

“I know James. She’s part of our pack and I wish there was something I could do. Lily is working with Slughorn over the summer to get whatever information it is Dumbledore wants her to get from him. Sirius and Regulus are trying to find out everything they can from their parents and other Death Eater families. Sirius said they’ve even been able to recruit those Slytherin girls that would always follow Sev around. You and I are searching... waiting, but when it’s time to act, we’ll be ready.”

James got up and squeezed Remus’s shoulder in gratitude.

“We are going to get her back. Whatever it takes, right James? That’s what you said.” Remus tried again.

James nodded. Yes, whatever it took, but he didn’t know where to start...

“We just need to trust, Dumbledore. He has a plan.”

James’s spine stiffened.

Dumbledore’s plan...

Dumbledore’s plan was to send his friends on little missions with only vague explanations. Dumbledore’s plan was to win a war and to use Potter gold to fund it. Not that he or his parents put up any fight, they would give up their whole vault if it meant getting Severina back. Trust Dumbledore...

*“I will help you fight, James. I will help you get her back, but you have to trust me.”*

“I’m going for a run,” James announced.

“James...” Remus called out with concern but James shot him a pleading look. Remus sighed and nodded, “Okay.”

James made his way outside. As soon as the summer night touched his skin and his feet landed on grass, he shifted and his hooves carried him away aimlessly. He ran until the air paled with sunlight, then he slowed.

His muscles burned with the strain of exercise and his lungs stung with damp cold air. He made to turn and make his way back home when his eyes caught a figure lying in a small patch of grass under a tree. The summer fawn saw him too and blinked at him. It was waiting for its mother to



return.

Waiting...

James lowered himself into the grass and watched over the fawn, waiting.

*What if she doesn't come back?* James thought, *What if she's in mortal danger? What if you're left alone and you never know why?*

Looking into the fawn's eyes, it was calm and unmoved, simply staring back at the strange stag that wasn't really a stag at all. It wasn't a voice at all that answered James's questions— it was an understanding, it was pure emotion: hope.

*She'll come back. She'll always come back because she loves me. Waiting is easy when you can trust love and hope.*

Trust.

Not Dumbledore, but Severina. He could trust Severina. He could trust their love; that their love would transcend circumstance and distance.

*"I can take care of myself."* He heard the memory of her voice.

*"I just want to protect you... I need to,"* he had said.

*"As long as you know you don't have to."*

Severina was a survivor. She was cunning and intelligent enough to get through this. He was never so glad she was a Slytherin then at this moment. They would get her back, but Severina wasn't some damsel in distress waiting for a hero to save her.

They were like Hadrian and Isolda. All Hadrian did was be faithful in his love and wait. Isolda was the one who saved Hadrian from a life of lonely poverty and gave him love and a family.

The sky warmed and the fawn drifted to sleep. As James watched the fawn sleeping peacefully he remembered another part of the legend... Hadrian had dreamed of Isolda. James hadn't been able to sleep well enough to dream since Severina had been taken. Maybe... What if...?

The doe appeared and glanced at James laying in the grass a little ways away from her fawn. She looked at him curiously but didn't seem overly bothered by his presence. She turned to her babe and nuzzled him awake. She helped her fawn steady himself on sleepy legs. As the two left, the fawn glanced back at James just before it took to prancing around its mother, as if to say, *See! I told you so! I told you she would come back for me.*

James huffed amused, *Of course she did, little one. She loves you.* James stood and turned home, ready now to wait.

Trixie greeted him with wide worried eyes and informed him of breakfast. James gave her a little smile and thanked her. Trixie brightened immediately. Hope is contagious, James thought.

His parents and the Lupins were all in the dining room but no one was eating. Instead, they all looked a little agitated. His mother's expression sighed in relief when she saw him.

"Oh, Jaime! Thank goodness you're home. We were so worried." Her nose wrinkled a bit when she got near, but a mother's hug couldn't be deterred by body odor, apparently. James hugged her



gently even as she squeezed him with more strength than one would assume the older witch capable of.

“James,” his father sighed, “I understand you wanted to get away for a bit, but you really worried us. We are already missing one family member.”

“Sorry, Dad. You don’t have to worry about that. You-Know-Who doesn’t want me.”

The statement clouded the room thick with hidden questions and one pervading: *What does he want with Severina?*

Jame tucked into breakfast, properly hungry for the first time since Severina was taken. The others followed his lead. He smiled encouragingly at everyone and they responded with a slight relaxing of their shoulders. It reminded him of something Severina had said to him once,

*”You’re a natural leader, James. The Marauders follow you like you have them all on these invisible strings and when you move, they move. They might question you or make suggestions but whatever you decide, they all follow. It was one of the reasons I was both attracted to you and resented you.*

*”You don’t follow me like that though.” He had said with a furrowed brow.*

*She suppressed a self-deprecating groan, ”Yes I do, James, or at least I’m not unaffected. Which is why I resent it sometimes. I don’t want to need anyone but myself.”*

*”Well, I need you. You have me completely wrapped around your fingers,” James said and brought her fingers to his lips and pressed kisses to her smooth knuckles until he reached her promise ring and brushed over it with his thumb, “and we belong together.”*

*She laughed and blushed at the look in his eye, “and woe be any who try to separate us?”*

*”Definitely,” he laughed and pulled her into a kiss.*

James felt people watching him and realized he had been smiling which probably seemed a bit out of place at present.

“Severina’s a survivor.” James said, “No matter what, she’ll find a way home. We just need to help her find her way back.”

The energy of the room lighten at his words and James turned to his father after scarfing down his toast, beans, mushrooms, and tomatoes, but leaving the eggs, bacon, and sausage alone. He just couldn’t stomach meat after having been in his animagus form so recently.

“Dad is there a potion that could help me remember my dreams? Or be awake for my dreams?”

“Like a lucid dream?” His father asked.

“Yeah, exactly.”

He thought a moment but then said, “No, I’m afraid there’s not. There is dream/less sleep, of course. I suppose, generally, people don’t care so much about exploring their dreams too much. Why do you ask?”

“I was just curious. Thought maybe my subconscious had a clue to helping Sev.”

Remus laughed softly and everyone looked at him curiously. He shifted in his seat, “I was only



thinking that if Severina were here, she would try to invent one for you.”

The Potters smiled sadly and Mr. Potter said, “She would succeed too. Well, I’ll look into it son, but I’m afraid that even in my prime I did not have the knack for complicated potions the way our Severina has. Creating a hair tonic is a far cry from assisting with a wolfsbane potion.”

“I’m sure you would do great, Dad. It was just an idea.”

Mr. Lupin cleared his throat after a sip of tea, “Do you boys remember when you all asked about Tom Riddle?”

James and Remus perked up. “You said he might have been a few years older than you at Hogwarts,” Remus said.

“Yes, well I did some digging and I had found his name mentioned in a most extraordinary case where a house-elf was convicted of murdering her Mistress, a Hepzibah Smith.”

Mrs. Potter gasped, “A house-elf? No.”

Mr. Lupin nodded, “Yes that was the result of the investigation, however, it does seem strange... Tom Riddle had worked at Borgin and Burkes at the time and Miss Smith had frequented the establishment. After her murder, he simply vanished.”

“And no one suspected him? They condemned the elf instead?” Mrs. Lupin asked her husband in disbelief.

Mr. Lupin sighed, “The house-elf confessed, but you must understand, my dear, it is not unlike a house-elf to blame itself... the house-elf most likely believed she had killed her Mistress. As for Riddle, everyone who knew him testified that he was incapable of murder. No one has testified to having heard or seen Riddle since and was generally believed that he also may have been a victim in the case.”

James met Remus’s eyes.

Mr. Lupin continued, “Another oddity about the case, was that, even after determining the house-elf responsible, Smith’s missing items never turned up.”

James’s attention snapped back to Mr. Lupin, “What items?”

Mr. Lupin squinted in thought, “A cup and a locket. Seems very random, doesn’t it? How could a cup and locket be worth the cost of a life?”

Mrs. Potter looked to her son with tears building in her eyes and her hands trembling, “And this is the man you believe to be... You-Know-Who? This is the man who has our Severina?” And her trembling fingers flew to her lips to catch her pained gasp. Her husband wrapped his arm around his wife and tried to comfort her.

James felt dizzy for a moment and stood suddenly. “That’s the man who Severina is going to outsmart. She’ll be home soon, don’t worry Mum. Severina will do whatever it takes and then she’ll come home.”

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Severina paced her prison helplessly. It was a very comfortable prison, with a bedroom, adjoining bathroom, and a little sitting room with a writing desk and a bookshelf filled with texts on alchemy,



potions, and the dark arts. The only person she ever saw was *him*. The rooms were warded to be without doors or windows, but a door would appear and always in a new place before *he* would walk through.

The clock on the wall ticked, a quarter past five in the morning. At six o'clock a little table of food would appear for her possibly by a house-elf who would not show itself. Sometimes he joined her — *Tom Riddle*.

Riddle... She had been able to find him in the student archives in the Hogwarts Library after the Christmas hols. Slytherin Prefect and then Head boy. Four years older than her own mother, three years older than Lyall Lupin and Orion Black, a year older than Walburga Black but two years younger than Abraxas Malfoy—they would have known him in school. They would know his name... Riddle was not a pureblood name that she was familiar with and hadn't found it in any of the genealogies she had found. If he wasn't pureblood... How had he amassed a radical group of blood purists? How did he change his name, collect a following, and turn Wizarding Britain into a dichotomy of Light and Dark?

The first time they met, he said that it wasn't as simple as light and dark or good and evil. What had he meant? Maybe he hadn't meant it at all. Maybe he had simply said what he thought would entice her to join his side.

He was full of contradictions. Even in his letters. Sometimes it seemed like he could be more than one person at any given time. He didn't make sense and Severina was starting to wonder if it was an exercise in futility to even try to make sense of him.

The door appeared and damn it...

"Ah, you are awake. It is good that you are an early riser, I abhor laziness." He said with a pleasant smile.

Seven o'clock and a table with two settings this morning. He pulled out a chair for her. Severina watched his hands gripping the chair. She could still remember his hand around her neck and the cruelty in his voice as he hissed *crucio*. She could still remember the pain as if the magic of the curse was trying to rip her apart from the inside out and skin her alive. Now, he stood genially offering her a seat and company for breakfast— kippers, and toast this morning.

She sat. "Thank you," she murmured and tried not to let her voice crack. She lay her napkin on her lap and watched him settle in his seat. He regarded her with an expression of approval. He liked these little niceties today. It was hard to tell who would walk in to see her. He always wore the same face, but behind the facade, it was hard to tell who he really was.

"Did you sleep well, my dear?"

"I slept as well as can be expected under the circumstances."

His jaw ticked. He held her eyes and she felt him against her walls. He sighed and then chuckled, "You know, I don't find myself saying this often, but I cannot read your mind. It pleases me that you have taken to occlumency so quickly, but tell me, my dear Severina, what is on your mind this morning?"

Severina focused on her breakfast and deflected, "I was thinking about the passage of time. It seems to be getting away from me lately. Time isn't running consistently anymore or at least my perception of time. I knew what time breakfast would come and yet I was surprised when it came."



He chuckled around his bite. "I understand completely," he said once he'd swallowed. "I often lose track of time when engrossed in a new topic of study. Have you found Nicholas Flamel interesting?"

She forced herself to swallow her food, "Yes and no. The biography is frustratingly vague," she paused but he watched her expectantly.

He was in a mood to be patient this morning.

She took a cleansing sip of tea, feeling a little annoyed with his psychological games, "You want me to create a Philosopher's Stone. Of course, that has been a primary purpose of alchemy since the beginning of alchemy, as far as I can tell. Nicholas Flamel is the only recorded creator of a Philosopher's Stone and personally, I think it very likely that Nicholas Flamel is a fraud."

At that he chuckled from the back of his throat, "And why is that?" He asked, amused.

"Well, if he's not a fraud then he's a perfectly useless individual. To hoard such a thing as the Philosopher's Stone and do considerably little with it? Alchemy, though interesting, is impractical if the Philosopher's Stone could be created by such a man. The book speaks of philanthropy and his part in ending the war with Grindelwald, but six centuries he claims to have lived, and yet he barely scraped the potential a wizard could accomplish in such a span of time. Grindelwald and yourself accomplished infinitely more in a fraction of the time the Flamels claim to have lived.'

She continued, "It took him a lifetime to create and he's old and feeble. He can keep his wife and himself alive and with as much gold as he could ever need and want, but to do what? To go senile and frail with age? Why doesn't the Elixir of Life heal age? Isn't the Elixir of Life the achievement of Panacea? Why would a cure-all not cure aging?"

He was smirking at her and watching her curiously. Severina shifted uncomfortably and tried not to show how uneasy he made her.

"Flamel must either be a great fool and a useless individual, or he is an accomplished conman. I would believe more, that he is simply an old man who took the name of a 14th-century wizard and claimed himself to be that wizard. Rather than a great alchemist who created a Philosopher's Stone, but not use it to its full purported advantages.'

"He also has at least two more strikes against him, one that he is friends with Albus Dumbledore and two,' she lifted her tea to her lips with a small smirk, 'he's French."

The Dark Lord laughed. He laughed so hard he propped his elbow on the table and rested his head in his hand as his shoulders shook with laughter. His laughter was strange to her ears. Not that she hadn't heard it before, but that it didn't seem to fit him. His laughter was high and rough, more like a cackle. It was a frightening laugh.

Once his laughter subsided, he chuckled a little and said, "Very good. I do admit, I also believed the same when I first took it upon myself to look into alchemy. It is not an ideal solution to that pesky obstacle of ambition and it is certainly not the only solution, but it would be a lovely plan B. There is evidence enough to suggest he is not a fraud and that he does indeed possess the Philosopher's Stone.'

He waved his hand with a flourish toward her writing desk and another two books appeared, "You'll be reading *The Book of Abramelin* next. One is the original text and one the translation—my own. Do let me know what you think."



With that he rose from his seat and came round to help her out of hers. The table and breakfast vanished and the Dark Lord lifted her hand to kiss her knuckles. Severina tried not to flinch and he smirked a little.

A door appeared and she waited for him to leave but just before he left, he turned back to look at her.

“It’s been a pleasure, Miss Snape. I’m afraid that my attention is required elsewhere today.”

He stepped away from the door, leaving it open into a hallway. He teased her with the open door, she thought. She forced her eyes away from the door to watch his approach. He held her eyes and his expression was unreadable. He hadn’t hurt her since that day, she had to remind herself. Still, it didn’t mean he couldn’t. He was unpredictable and she could never be safe while he was near. Not safe from him.

“Try to miss me a little,” he said and bent his face to her cheek and pressed his lips into her skin.

Her eyes sought the open door again. Was he playing with her, like a cat with a mouse, loosening its grip and teasing its prey with the hope of escape only to snatch it back with its deadly claws? Would she exhaust herself to the point of limp death in his hands? Or was he linking himself with freedom, manipulating her to miss him like she missed the open door until she forgot why she wanted to be free? If that’s what he was hoping, he didn’t understand... He couldn’t possibly understand what she and James had, what they were to each other.

She leaned into his kiss a little as he started to pull away. It was him this time fighting not to flinch and she suppressed her smirk.

“You will not be gone long, I hope.” She asked demurely, fluttering her eyelashes a little and feigning a high sickly sweet voice.

He examined her face and her breath stopped when she saw his hand reach for her. He stroked her jaw with his fingertips, trailing the sensation of touch to her chin and she tried not to jerk away.

He chuckled, “You have a lot to learn about seducing a man, Severina.”

Severina rolled her eyes, “I’m trying to make a point. Do you want me to play psychological games with you?” She took a careful step towards him, careful not to touch him but close enough to feel his body’s heat and he, hers. She spoke low and soft, lifting her chin higher to keep eye contact and his fingers fell from her face. “Do you really want me to waste my time learning how to seduce you?” His head tilted to the side examining her from another angle and she stepped away and straightened herself, “or do you want me to be your Alchemist?”

He shook his head, laughing again, but she continued, “I need equipment to work with, ingredients to conduct experiments, not just books to study, and I need my wand.”

His laughter stopped and his face was unreadable. “I’ll think on it,” he said and Severina almost lightened with hope, but then, “for a kiss,” her body stiffened, “just on the cheek, nothing indecent.” His voice was light and teasing, but his eyes were hard as stone.

“You promise,” She asked, “just on the cheek and nothing indecent?”

His face seemed frozen as he stood with his hands clasped behind his back. He nodded once and bowed his head a little for her to reach. She stepped in, quickly press her lips to the hollow of his cheek, and pulled away with an uncomfortable knot in her throat. His jaw clenched.



“No, not like that,” still with his hands behind his back, he leaned forward and rest his cheek against hers, “like this,” he said softly.

His lips barely touched her skin, pressed against her cheekbone, and lingered there until he rolled his face away, waiting for reciprocation. Severina squeezed her eyes closed and tried again, ghosting her lips ever-so-slightly over his cheek until she reached the curve of his cheekbone and pressed a lingering kiss there. He leaned into it fractionally before it was him who pulled away.

His eyes were still hard and unreadable, but he bowed politely. Without another word from either of them, he left her alone, taking the open door with him.

Severina sank to her knees and buried her face in her hands and wept. She filled with loneliness and loss, not for the door or Tom Riddle, but for James. She wept for the part of herself she had to hide and reign in, the part that wanted to break down the wards with her bare hands to get out and get back to James. She could barely sleep at all, awoken by restlessness throughout the night and somehow she knew... she knew James was hurting acutely. Often, she would wake with tears in her eyes and a sob prone in her throat.

“Oh James,” she whimpered and cried until finally, she couldn’t cry anymore. She pulled herself up, cleaned herself off, and shoved away unnecessary emotions. Then she went to her little desk, sat down, and opened the book.



## Chapter 35

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Severina pulled her knees to her chest and rocked herself, unconsciously seeking a small measure of comfort. Her face froze in horror staring across the room where the notes she had found still lay on her desk. Where *he* had left them for her to find...

She pressed her back into the corner of the room where the walls met. It was the furthest point she could get from what she just read as if she could physically distance herself from the knowledge she had attained.

She felt hot tears on her cheek and she whimpered.

She had been wrong about Tom Riddle, so wrong, so incredibly wrong. She hadn't understood him at all. She thought she had seen a mirror of ambition, but he was more than ambition... he was insanity.

Last night he came in like a storm, snapping at her, "Haven't you finished, yet?"

She hadn't even noticed the door appear before his voice startled her to her feet. His face was twisted with rage. Blood splatters covered the side of his face and his eyes glowed red.

Severina stumbled backward at the sight and her heart cried, *Please, not James....*

Severina never knew how she was able to regain control. It was as if instinct kicked in, her fear retreated behind her occlumency walls and she responded with vague annoyance even as her voice held a shudder of fear,

"You mean, have I mastered Alchemy while you were out? I'm afraid not."

He stepped forward, towering over her, and cupped her jaw forcing her to look up at him. His eyes flashed to her lips and for a moment Severina feared that he meant to kiss her.

"Do not forget who I am, Severina," He hissed.

"I could never forget who you are... My Lord," and *who you are not*, she thought. She sucked in a quick breath and defended, "It took Nicholas Flamel nearly a lifetime to create the philosopher's stone. I'll not accomplish such a feat in one summer."

"One summer?" He smiled cruelly, 'Are you going somewhere this autumn?"

He chuckled through his nose as he stepped away from her, releasing her face. He pulled out a handkerchief and wiped at the blood on his face and hands.

His smirk grew, noticing the horror she couldn't quite hide. "What? No: 'Where have you been?' 'What time do you call this?' Not even: 'Why are you covered in blood?'" He laughed.

Severina hardened herself to his possible answer and asked, "Why are you covered in blood?"

"Abraxas was to keep something for me and seems to have," his nostrils flared and he spoke through his teeth, "misplaced it."



His attention turned to the dinner table which appeared in its usual spot. She had already eaten dinner, possibly hours ago. There was tea set for her, however, and he pulled out her chair. She sat with no other choice.

Severina watched as Riddle ate with more appetite than usual. All the while, her stomach churned with dread.

He looked up at her and clicked his tongue in disapproval. He got up and approached her side. Severina flinched when he knelt beside her and reached for her face, but he proceeded unfazed as he held her chin gently between his fingers. He wiped at her cheek, where he must have left his bloody fingerprints.

“I’m afraid I’ve stained you.”

Severina turned to look at him and noted the blood he missed on his own face. She took her napkin and wiped at the blood below his sideburns and down his jaw. He blinked at her but did not move away.

“You’ve stained yourself.” She remarked.

He remained in silence a moment, taking her in. She had meant it as a condemnation, but he seemed to take it as a statement of solidarity because he took her hands in his and met her eyes and said,

“Severina, I need you to make the elixir for me, for us. I have so much planned; one lifetime won’t be enough and I need to be alive to see it all come to fruition.” He stroked the back of her hand with his thumb, “When I met you, I thought I finally found someone who can understand ambition for what it is. Ambition is what makes the world turn. You will help me turn the world, Severina. You and I, together, we will have no obstacles.”

Severina thought she did understand how Tom Riddle was able to gain such power and influence. There were times when he could speak to the darkest part of her and call it out as if it belonged to him. Her ambitions lusted after his words and she knew without a doubt that had her soul not loved James so irreparably, she would have given all to the wizard before her for a taste of what he offered— a life without restraint or obstacle to what could be accomplished.

Riddle rose to his feet and proffered his hand to her. As she took his hand and stood, the table and chairs disappeared. Severina’s mind ran through the events of this strange evening and something occurred to her,

“What is Dumbledore taking from you?” She asked him.

“I’ve told you.” He answered, still standing close and Severina couldn’t help but think that if it were James standing where Riddle was, she would be wrapped in his arms.

Severina murmured, “I don’t understand.”

“I think, Severina, you might be the only one who could understand,” he said; then bent his head and kissed her cheek.

The skin where he kissed tingled long after he left. He kissed her just beside the corner of her mouth, as though he was tempting her lips. She didn’t want to kiss him or him her, but it was driving her mad because it didn’t make any sense. Had she never experienced what love felt like, she might have mistaken Riddle’s games as love, but she knew better. She knew what love felt like; it wasn’t this.



Not that Tom Riddle was without temptation. He played his game well.

Tom Riddle wanted her to believe he was in love with her for some reason that she couldn't quite understand. It seemed like a lot of effort for nothing and the Dark Lord wouldn't invest so much time and effort for no reason. He had courted her for a year and she had thought it was for the Dark Mark, but now she believed it to have been for the Philosopher's Stone all along.

It all seemed very calculated... but why? Why would he need her to be in love with him? To ensure loyalty, perhaps?

She slept that night with these questions spinning around in her head and the next morning she found his notes on top of her alchemy texts. With the innocence of naivety, she read them.

The notes started with copied excerpts and page references from a book entitled *Secrets of the Darkest Art*. At first, she didn't realize what she was reading or what it meant. It wasn't the first study of dark magic he had left for her, but this was something else. It wasn't until the notes became less like a study reference and read more like an experiment, she realized what steps Tom Riddle was willing to take to achieve his ambitions without the obstacle of mortality.

It was one thing to read in theory the existence of a Horcrux; it was another to read the detailed creation of one by its creator. So sickening the act was, she almost didn't make it to the toilet when she vomited what little remained in her stomach from the previous day. When she finally was able to return to the desk, she found she was most disturbed by how many more pages were left. She forced herself to keep reading and when she finally finished, she sought the corner of the room in a fruitless attempt to distance herself from what she learned.

Severina had ignored breakfast and couldn't stomach lunch. When dinner came the door appeared in her room and she watched Tom Riddle enter from the corner of her eye. He regarded her curled-up figure with a curious tilt to his head. He walked to the desk and touched his notes.

He made no comment as he approached her and sat on his haunches in front of her. He observed her for a while and she squeezed herself more tightly, staring at him in horrified disbelief as if he were nothing more than an apparition of evil.

She heard him take a deep breath before he spoke softly to her, "Now, don't look at me like that. We live in a society that calls a Dementor's kiss *justice*. Is it so very different from what I have done? Is it so hard to believe that I would want to protect my own soul?" He started to reach his hand towards her and she flinched. He sighed, "You wanted to understand, Severina. Do you understand now?"

Her eyes moved back and forth as if searching for the understanding she had wanted. The only thing she understood, the only thing that made any sense at all, like a mantra that bound them together,

"Death is ambition's only obstacle."

"Exactly," he said in a fervent whisper, "I knew you'd understand."

Did she really understand? She thought that maybe he was the one who didn't understand. Did he really think what he had done was justifiable? Did he really think destroying his soul in such a way protected it? Severina tried to find understanding within her own mind, but she only found...

"You are trembling, Severina. Are you frightened?" His hand reached for her again, touched her cheek and she shivered as if pressed by ice, "Are you frightened of me?"



Her eyes met his, her lip quivered and she answered, “There is not a word strong enough to describe the terror I feel in your presence.”

His eyes fell to her lips, she whimpered from the back of her throat and tucked her face into her knees. She felt him lean in and kiss the top of her head.

“Good.” He said cruelly. He stood and placed something glass on the desk. “Take this sleeping draught. We’ll talk more tomorrow. You’ll understand better... You belong here, Severina. You belong here with me.”

## Chapter End Notes

LThis chapter was inspired by a theory I read about how Tom Riddle may have created the horcruxes. I hinted at it but I did try to leave it a bit ambiguous in the spirit of JK Rowling. If you are interested in reading the theory (WARNING: It may change the way you perceive Tom and if you are a fan of Tom Riddle, you may want to maintain your innocence), here is the article:

<http://scottwritesstuff.com/2017/09/14/make-horcrux-deducing-horrible-act/>



## Chapter 36

If James could chose he would never wake up. He would remain in his dreams with Severina forever. When he closed his eyes he fell into a world that was all their own, one they created together every night. In the morning, however, Severina would leave their dreams for the waking hell in which she lived and all memory of their time together was lost to her subconscious.

James's father had garnered help from some of his old professional contacts and eventually, he was able to create a potion for his son to remember his dreams. It took a couple of trials with varying success. One attempt left James with insomnia for week which was the opposite effect for which they hoped. Another trial gave him night terrors no one could wake him from until the potion wore off. After one trial which left James asleep for a night and a day, his father nearly said, 'never again,' but James was adamant that they were close and that it was necessary.

Now James remembered. He remembered every night he met Severina in his dreams and he would wake in the mornings wishing for it to be night again.

James sat at the edge of his bed looking at the vial on his nightstand and the journal which sat next to it. Tom Riddle's diary full of blank pages mocked him from his bedside.

They were so close to finding her. Even if she couldn't remember their dreams, James did. He remembered everything. He knew Dumbledore was behind her kidnapping. He knew now what Severina seemed to know all along, that they were fighting two enemies and they had to be their own side. Despite James's screams and declarations that he would kill Dumbledore with the fury of vengeance, Severina had talked him down as she always does when he's eager to run head first into folly.

Dumbledore had to be kept in the dark.

Had James never found out about the role Dumbledore played in Severina's disappearance, he may have had pity on the old wizard. The only pity James felt was that Dumbledore would likely die of Tom Riddle's curse before James had a chance at him.

James avoided Dumbledore when he could and never met his eyes when he couldn't. They didn't need Dumbledore anymore. They were their own side as they always were, but now they were growing.

Tom Riddle had misstepped too many times, moved too quickly, was too eager. Descent among the Death Eaters was growing. All they needed was a little hope and a lot of anger.

It was all Severina's idea, really, and she didn't even know that her ideas were becoming reality. Severina had told him that she thought Tom Riddle might not be a pureblood and yet he pandered to blood purists. She thought it was cleverly ironic but a dangerous gamble.

"Followers are fickle," she had explained, "Remember how quickly and violently the school turned on me when we started dating because of rumors about us? Even some of the professors. Then how quickly they turned again once Burke and the other Slytherin girls changed the rumor? All you need is a good rumor and the right people to spread it."

So James started a rumor with the help of the Slytherin girls. They didn't start at the top, but at the bottom. They started with people who hadn't picked a side yet. "The Dark Lord is himself a half-blood. He hates pure-bloods and wants to make them all fools. He thinks they are all too stupid and



gullible to figure out that he's just using them for his own selfish gains."

It wasn't until a few days ago that they found out how close to the truth they were. Lily had finally gotten Slughorn to open up about Tom Riddle. Slughorn had believed Riddle had shared the same fate as Hepzibah Smith. He insisted Riddle could not be He Who Must Not be named or associated with him. When Lily asked him if Riddle ever had an interest in the dark arts, however...

James picked up the journal and leafed through the empty pages. It wanted him to write in it; he could feel it. James bit down on his cheeks and set the journal back on the nightstand. Regulus hadn't known what it was when he had found it in the Malfoy's library, only that it had Tom Riddle's name on it. After Lily's revelation, James had his suspicions on what the journal actually was.

James tried to warn Severina of the monster she was trapped with, but nothing he said or told her seemed to carry over into the next night. Last night she had been disturbed, to say the least and told him to contact Lucius.

James had his doubts and didn't expect Lucius to answer him at all, let alone meet with him that same day. Lucius had looked older, more strained, hardened and somehow even more proud than James remembered seeing him last, at his wedding. The Malfoys seemed willing enough to deflect as long as it wasn't to Dumbledore.

They were so close to an end, James could feel it. To what end he was not sure, but he had hope and he had his dreams with Severina to keep him going.

James uncorked the vial of potion and drank before lying down in his bed. It didn't take long to leave the waking world and find himself in the woods outside their little cottage. It was as they dreamed Hadrian and Isolda lived. There was a steady little stream within sight of the cottage where the unicorns could come drink. Abreast the cottage grew a practical little garden with a picket fence. James stepped on the stone path leading to the door, thinking he would go in and wait for Severina to fall asleep, but before he reached the door, it opened and Severina was already there.

She gasped his name, "James," with a longing that broke his heart and healed it all at once. Then she ran to him like she did every night and every night he caught her and said,

"I'm here, love."

But unlike other nights, she did not melt into him with relief. Instead, she clung to him almost violently and he could hear her choking on her tears. James tried to pull away to look at her,

"Severina, what's happened?"

She buried her face hard into his shoulder and let out a horrified scream. James held on to her, supporting her as her body felt determined to fall into the ground.

"He's a monster, James," she cried through him.

---

Severina slipped from her dream trying desperately to hold on to it without remembering why she didn't want to let it go. Most mornings when she woke longing for James's arms she would feel like her chest was caving in. This morning, however, was different. She felt like she had an answer...



She figured it out... She knew how to make the philosopher's stone...

At least she believed she did. She could create the philosopher's stone and be the second to ever do so.

It was enough to make her hysterical. She understood now, why Nicholas Flamel had accomplished apparently so little with his long life. He couldn't...

*The Book of Abramelin* and the Philosopher's stone was on the surface just that, a philosopher's stone. It wasn't a sorcerers stone, it wasn't magic at all. Its roots in Jewish Mysticism were not magical in essence but in religion and philosophy. Basically, on the surface, the philosopher's stone was an ancient tablet of a life philosophy on longevity through healthy and moralistic living, but then the application of magic and alchemy... the magic...

Magic was about intent. To create the philosophers stone, one had to have the pure philosophical intent in creating it. It could not be created for personal gain or ambition. The formation of materials into gold could not be for the intent of greed. The elixir of life could not be made with the intent of immortality, but for healing... and not just healing... selfless... to save the life of another.

The reason no one could create it before was because they all wanted gold and immortality for themselves. What Flamel had... what was evident and clear throughout his near 600 years of life was his *wife*; his love for his wife and she for him. The primary ingredient to alchemy was *love*; a love that was greater than love for oneself.

Had she never loved so greatly, she would have laughed at the ridiculous notion... the power of love. How could love have power? Because love was a pure intent, one of the purest. It was the easiest way to access selflessness. Maybe the only way.

Selfless ambition, on the surface seemed a more ineffective form of progress because of the difficulty in fostering true selflessness. In light of this, Severina had to amend her first impressions of Nicholas Flamel and his wife. Their long life and their philanthropic achievements were truly remarkable because it would have had to be pure intent. They hadn't perfected it. Even in six centuries, true selflessness was apparently a difficult pursuit, but not impossible.

Could she make it for the Dark Lord if she did not love him the way she loved James? She wondered if the Dark Lord knew. She wondered if he was trying to manipulate her all this time. Was he trying to make her love him in some twisted way? His letters, his shared knowledge, shared meals, were these all just clumsy attempts at courtship? She nearly pitied him for his shallow understand of what love entailed, but she resented him too for trying to bait her into love for selfish reasons.

How much did Dumbledore know? Did he know this all along? Did he know she'd figure it out? How could he, unless he possessed talents of divination or knew someone who did?

But she could make it! She could make it for James and the Potters, she could mix it with wolfsbane potion and maybe... maybe heal Remus completely. She could do it because James loved her.

There was something else too... The philosopher's stone was said to purify the soul. Did that mean that the philosophers stone purified one's soul because the creation of the stone had to be done through pure motives and therefore a purifying process in the creation of the stone? Or could the stone purify a corrupted soul? Could she put Tom Riddle's soul back together?



The door appeared and Severina startled at the sudden pull from her thought into reality. He looked particularly handsome this morning. His lips pulled up in a gentle smile and he held a hand behind his back with casual nonchalance.

“Good morning, Severina,” he greeted softly almost tenderly.

“Good morning, my Lord.”

“Did you sleep well?”

“Yes, I did.”

“I’m delighted to hear it,” and his eyes looked sincere.

There was something different about him this morning. He was softer somehow. He pulled out her chair which had appeared with the table for breakfast. She sat as usual, but he didn’t.

He knelt down beside her. The Dark Lord knelt... and was looking up at her. Severina was so stunned she put up no resistance when he took her hand and kissed her knuckles as if in reverence. Still with one hand behind his back his eyes never left hers, pulling her in and holding her.

“Severina, I—“ he brushed his thumb across the back of her left hand. “I have never let anyone know me as you do. Since the moment I met you, I— I have felt that you are the answer to questions I hardly knew to ask. I cannot shake this feeling, this confidence, that our destinies are bound together. Do you believe in destiny, Severina?”

“Yes,” she answered.

He nodded and finally brought around his hidden hand. He held her wand and placed in her right hand. Severina could feel the magic of her wand calling out to her and clinging to her power. The comforting familiar touch of her wand felt like a breath of crisp clean air.

She didn’t notice his continued movements until another familiar sensation caught her attention. The ring he slipped on her finger snaked around to fit snug against her skin, but now on her left ring finger. He looked up at her and Severina felt her stomach twist uncomfortably.

“Severina,” he breathed her name as he rose and his face neared hers.

Severina pulled back with a gasp, “I know how to make it,” she said quickly, “the Philosopher’s stone.”

He stopped and his eyes bore into hers.

“I know I can make it and the Elixir of Life... for you.”

“Us,” he said, “make it for us, Severina, and the world will be ours.”

He cupped her jaw and kissed her forehead. Severina let herself fall into him a little, her head rested on his shoulder. She hoped she really could make it with the right intention and just maybe she could save them all. Even the monster who held her.



## Chapter 37

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

*That was too close*, Tom Riddle thought to himself as he stumbled home, *that was too close...*

He gasped as he finally reached his threshold and clung to the walls to steady himself. He didn't look back to see the trail of blood he left behind. The house-elves would clean it later as long as they kept out of his sight. Salazar, he hated simpering house-elves.

He reached his study and his potions cabinet. The healing draught did its work to repair the internal bleeding. He felt his wounds knitting back together and let out a long relieved groan as he stretched out the tightness in his body.

As he washed and dressed, he planned. He always planned. He didn't know how else to function. His current plan, however, was being forced forward more quickly than he had anticipated.

Dumbledore was either feeling more desperate than usual or more confident. Either way, Tom couldn't face him again. Not against the elder wand. Not until he had the elixir of life.

Tom crossed into the hall and stood before the expanse of wallpaper just outside his bedroom door. He rubbed at his brow. If only he didn't need her. She complicated his plans. She was unpredictable.

He took out his wand and traced the pattern of runes into the wall. The runes glowed bright and then faded. The door appeared and he opened it.

His eyes went first to her workstation. She had made the simple desk her own, piled books to one side and working alchemy experiments to the other. The rest of the room might as well not exist.

Tom felt his lips pulling up into his cheeks.

She was there at her desk. Her sleeping head resting on her arms atop her work. Tom approached as quietly as he could to examine her progress.

She was close; so close to finishing the elixir. Soon it would be his. He looked down at her sleeping form. Soon, so would she be. Not yet though. He would be eternally shackled to this girl, best not start off on the wrong foot. Well... any more than he had.

When he had met her, it had been... a revelation. She was meant to be his. He could feel it deep in his bones. She should have been his utterly and completely from the moment they met. Only, he realized that he already had a rival.

The boy had been too tall for his invisibility cloak. The fool. He must have been slouching as much as possible but still his feet peaked out every once in a while as he walked around the banquet hall at the Malfoy wedding.

Severina was too good for that boy. He'll be nothing but a passing fancy. Still, it was annoying to have to wait out the teenage angst. She still thought about the boy. She still longed for him. It would be so much easier if he could just give her amor-tentia or oblivate the Potter boy from her mind, but he couldn't risk her ability to make the philosopher's stone.



Tom reached out and brushed her hair from her face. Her head rested on her left hand and his ring sat predominately on her finger. He touched the metal snake gently.

She would not long for the boy forever. She belonged to him now. It was only a matter of time and she would give in to him. She would long for him as she longs for her freedom and for her invisible boy.

Tom would be freedom to her as she will be salvation for him. She would create the elixir of life and free him from the fear of death.

Tom bent down and slipped his arms around Severina's sleeping form. He lifted her in his arms as carefully as he could so not to wake her. She curled into his chest a little and her hand went to his neck, finding purchase there. He carried her to her bed and flicked his fingers to pull back the sheets before he laid her down gently. She didn't roll away from him, however, but clung a little more tightly to his neck.

Tom's eyes fell to the sleeping girl's lips and he swallowed hard.

How long could he keep from kissing her? Was eternity too long? Tom Riddle knew better than most what a kiss could mean. Would he bind them together forever or shatter them both between their lips?

Tom raised his chin and pressed his lips to her brow.

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Severina smiled fondly at James as he told her animatedly about how he and Sirius played a game of chicken on their brooms— flying full speed straight at each other and seeing who pulled up first. The young couple sat together across from each other outside their cottage, their legs entwined. James pantomimed his story and Severina did her utmost not to laugh so hard that she missed any of it.

“I doubt I’ve ever gone so fast in my life! I could feel tears just flying out of the corners of my eyes and my cheeks were flapping in the wind and Sirius and I were just screaming out our battle cries. Remus watched between his fingers and Pete munched popcorn. Sirius and I pulled up at the same time and I swear the bottoms of our brooms grazed each other when we looped away. Gah! I think Lily may have taken a picture.”

Severina's throat constricted suddenly, “Lily?”

“Yeah. Oh! Lily and Reggie are apparently an item now. Finally. It doesn't seem to have helped Reggie from blushing every time Lily talks to him. In fact it seems to have gotten worse. Red as a cherry.” James smiled a little sadly and his shoulders slumped, “I’ve told you about them flirting and such, but of course you don't remember.” He perked himself up and cupped her cheek, brushing his thumb across her cheekbone as she leaned into him, “No worries. I'll just tell you it all again when you come home.”

“I miss you so much, James. I miss you every minute of everyday.”

James pulled her into himself and kissed her steadily. He pulled away reluctantly, “I miss you too, Love, every minute, everyday.”

Severina traced his jaw with her fingers, mapping and memorizing him, wishing she could remember their nights to get her through her days. If only her dreams were her reality and reality nothing but a bad dream. James would always be her preferred reality.



But truth was a stubborn thing and she would never truly get back home to James if she stayed asleep.

“I’ve almost completed the stone. In fact, I fell asleep at my desk,” she chuckled. “What is Pettigrew up to these days?”

James sighed and shifted into somber severity, “He still meets with Dumbledore. Only now he tells him what I want him to. Dumbledore is running out of time. Which means we are all running short of time. The curse is spreading and I don’t know how many more battles he has in him. He might be battling Riddle as we sleep.”

“The elixir isn’t ready yet. We don’t necessarily need Dumbledore... we just need someone to wound Riddle mortally when the time comes. He needs to be desperate enough to take the elixir.”

“I’ll do it.”

“James...”

“Sev...” He mimicked. “Look, I’ll be fine. I won’t be alone. Whatever you need, consider it done. Whatever it takes to get you home. I’ll do whatever it takes.”

Severina shook her head and her face twisted in pain, “I don’t even know if it’ll work or if it’ll work the way I intend...”

James scoffed boyishly, “Not with that attitude! Really, trust your intention. If you don’t, it won’t work. If you do, it will.”

“You make it sound so simple.”

“And you overcomplicate it. You’re a witch, Severina. Aren’t you? Magic is in your nature and is therefore natural to you. You’re always trying so damn hard. Always working, striving, pushing... just let it happen. Your magic knows what to do. Stop getting in its way. It’s how I fly, turn into an animagus, how I use legilimency... We don’t use magic so much as we are vessels for magic.”

Severina listened with wonder and couldn’t figure out how to rationalize the awe she felt of him at that moment. So, she just let herself feel it. Her eyes roamed over him and she soaked him into her soul.

He grinned, “Am I smarter in your dreams?”

Severina laughed, “In *your dreams*.”

They both laughed together. Until James reached for her and she leaned into him. She curled herself towards his chest and rested her hand on his neck. James bent his head to kiss her lips, but Severina felt the warm press of lips against her forehead and woke.

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Tom felt the tip of her wand digging into his jugular before he saw that her eyes had opened.

He chuckled, “Honey, I’m home.”



Tom Riddle gives me whiplash.



## Chapter 38

Severina knew she should lower her wand, but fear kept it pressed into the Dark Lord's neck. Even as he straightened and moved away, she kept her wand on him. He ignored it.

"You fell asleep at your work," he answered her unvoiced question and said smoothly, "You're making great progress."

"Thank you my Lord," her voice spoke with rough awakening as she lowered her wand.

He looked ragged, wrapped in pristine robes. His eyes were sunken and half-lidded. He swayed a little on his feet.

"Are you feeling alright?" Severina asked.

He looked as though he would answer her but his expression shifted and he examined her. "Are you concerned about me?"

Severina tried to swallow down her guilt. Yes, but only because she needed more time. His eyes fell a little while waiting her answer.

"Perhaps, my Lord, you should go to bed yourself."

He nodded and lowered himself beside her on the edge of her bed. Severina's spine stiffened as she was made to move over to give him space. He reached out and took her left hand in his.

"Your concern is touching, Severina," his thumb brushed back and forth against the ring. "We lost our battle tonight. Dumbledore... he was more aggressive than usual. He's getting desperate. Not matter... We will win in the end. I just need the elixir and we will win them all."

He laid back onto the bed still holding her hand. Severina tried to pull a little to free herself, "I should get back to work then."

"Not tonight, Severina. Finish in the morning. Rest with me," he opened his arms to her.

Everything in her hardened. She watched the powerful, handsome, charming wizard lie down in her bed coaxing her to lie down with him and all she could think was, *I can't do this*.

Pure intent— she needed pure intent. She needed to truly want to knit him back together, truly want to save him.

But she didn't. She just wanted to be free, to be with James again. She was hoping to use her love for James to create the stone. The stone would prove to be the easy part, but it wasn't James she was creating the Elixir of Life for, it was Tom Riddle.

And she couldn't. She couldn't love Tom Riddle.

"Please," he mumbled, already half asleep, and he pulled a little on her hand.

Severina laid down next to him. He would be asleep soon and she could leave the bed as soon as he was asleep. She meant to put space between them, but he guided her into him and laid her in the cradle of his chest.

So she listened to his breath drift into sleep and she counted his heartbeats beneath her ear. *I*



*cannot love Tom Riddle*, she thought to herself and in reply, the darkest part of her scoffed.

Riddle twitched a little in his sleep and Severina carefully propped herself up off his chest to examine him. *He's dreaming*, she thought.

He looked somehow, older rather than younger in his sleep and his magic radiated off him like a dark shield against threat. It thrilled her in a way that she did not want to think about and she moved carefully off the bed.

She went back to her work station, knowing that she would not sleep while he was in the room with her. She would finish the stone and tackle the elixir when she came to it.

She heard him move behind her and she turned to see him still sleeping, but having an active sort of dream. Not violent, but enough to have kicked off the duvet a bit. Severina sighed and approached him to replace the blanket. His brow knit and he had a frown on his face.

Severina dared to touch the wrinkles of his brow and they softened. She felt her heart twist in her chest as if to try to squeeze out some emotion for him.

She sighed softly, "I pity you, Tom Riddle, and I hope that's enough." She bent and placed a kiss on his brow before she turned back to her desk and to her work.

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Tom Riddle fell into a dream surrounded by the sense of familiarity without any recognition of the woods in which he found himself. The woods were richly green and full of life, sprinkled with blossoming herbs. Somehow he knew this place, but to his memory he had never been here before. He started to walk forwards towards a destination he knew not.

As he walked, the whole world seemed to tremble and an anguished voice cried out,

"Come back to me... please."

Tom Riddle smiled. He knew that voice...

"Is that you, Invisible Boy?" He chuckled, "Are you calling for Severina?"

The sky darkened into a stormy grey and Tom Riddle walked on towards the boy's voice.

The boy growled, imitating the man he might become, "Where is she, you bastard?"

Tom strolled through the woods, enjoying the walk with his hands behind his back, thinking with satisfaction where indeed Severina was at that moment. The boy continued to shout and growl his frustration and soon Tom found him in a clearing that housed a quaint little cottage.

The boy was searching for him in the wrong direction.

"Let her go! I'll stop it nothing to get her back! I'll tear you apart to get to her! Do you hear me?"

Tom leaned against a tree at the edge of the clearing, where the boy might see, if only he were to turn around.

"I'll kill you! You hear me, Tom Riddle? I will fucking kill you!"

Tom growled at the sound of his name and snarled, "Will you now?"



He boy spun and saw Tom there. Angry tears streamed down his cheeks and he glared at him. Not with fury as one might expect, but with pain and desperation.

Tom smiled.

“You wish to know where she is?” He asked, feigning sympathy.

The boy’s nostrils flared and he was breathing heavily, but he didn’t answer.

“Shall I tell you where she is?” He reiterated kindly, but with a smirk that didn’t match his tone.

Tom chuckled as he thought of the boy’s reaction, “She’s safe. Indeed, she is asleep. Asleep in my arms,” he grinned cruelly.

The boy, however, only shook his head, “No.”

“I assure you, she is.”

“No,” the boy said again confidently, “If she were asleep, she would be here.”

Tom frowned and scanned the area quickly.

The boy continued, “You can’t keep her, Riddle. She won’t stay with you. She belongs with me. We love each other in a way you could never understand.”

This boy was really starting to piss him off.

The boy kept on, “Set her free and you’ll see, that she’ll run to me. You’ll never be able to keep her.”

Hot rage rose within him. Tom pushed himself off the tree, standing straight with his fists at his sides and shouted,

“Enough! She is mine! She is my destiny and with me, she is exactly where she is meant to be. You cannot offer a fraction of what I can. She will stay by my side for always and nothing so temporary as her infatuation with you will keep us from achieving all that we are meant to achieve together. You have nothing to offer her that I could not offer tenfold.”

“No!” The boy shouted, the veins in his neck protruded against his skin.

Tom Riddle relaxed in the wave of the boy’s anger and laughed aloud. Moments passed as the boy calmed himself and Tom’s amusement settled.

The boy looked his rival straight in the eye and said,

“I can offer Severina more in one lifetime than you could in all of eternity. She and I chose each other. Together, we are the soul we create together. Destiny may have a path for us all, but there are many ways to get to it and I chose Severina and she chose me. You were too late and I am so very grateful for that.”

The skies lightened, turned warm and clear.

“I’ve made you a promise tonight, Tom Riddle. I have to leave now, but I hope to see you on the battle field. Soon,” and the boy simply disappeared where he stood.

Tom stared with clenched jaw. A strange and visceral feeling pounded in his chest. It drove him



into the cottage.

The cottage was nothing much. Nothing close to what he and Severina would have once they realized their ambitions. The boy was wrong. Lord Voldemort offered her the world and the most favored place by his side. What could the boy possibly think he had...

Tom's eyes caught on a picture frame hung on the wall. Severina was smiling and the boy had his arms around her, but they weren't alone. The picture frame was crowded with the smiling, laughing faces of their friends. Throughout the cottage were pictures on wall of Severina or the boy or their friends and all of them smiling. Tom reach one of Severina sitting under a tree reading, looking peaceful and content. She looked up from her book and turned toward the camera and smiled with warmth and love, such that Tom Riddle had never known and he stumbled to see it.

He watched the picture again and again until he couldn't stand it anymore and turned from it. Only for his eyes to find Severina's image again. This time the boy was with her, smiling affectionately down at her while she returned his gaze and lifted her chin to catch the love off the boy's lips.

No... To fuse their love together.

Tom's whole being felt like it was crumbling inward. He didn't understand. He didn't understand the feeling trying to burn from his gut up through his chest, choking his throat. He only knew rage and so he reached for the picture to crash it to the ground, but his hand passed right through it as if it he were not actually there at all.

Every picture he turned to in his rage was the same. It was as if he were only an observer and not an influencer of this world. No matter how hard he tried, he could not destroy what they had built here together.

Tom Riddle found himself in front of that picture again. Severina looked up from her book almost at him but not really, she was looking a little off camera to an invisible boy whom she loved. Tom stood there, staring at the picture until the world started to fade and his awareness of this place vanished.

When Tom's eyes opened to a world where his name was forbidden, to where he had influence and power. He opened his eyes to his reality where he was alone. Severina had not remained in his arms until morning. She was not even in the bed.

Tom rubbed he lingering sleep from his eyes with his palms and found that his cheeks were wet with tears. Tears he did not understand. He did not remember dreaming in the night and even so, he would not understand the tears in his eyes.

He felt, however, that he needed to see Severina... He *needed* to see her.

So he rose from the bed and as soon as he saw her, he stopped. She was focused on her task before her, mixing the cauldron which was simmering slightly and the steam rose out in gentle wisps.

She removed the golden stirring rod and took up a ladle. Tom held his breath... She was about to create the Philosopher's stone. She paused with eyes closed shut. She sat like that a while in an almost meditative trance until her eyes opened and an emotion filled her face... an emotion Tom thought he might have seen in a dream once.

Severina ladled the mixture with her left hand and held out her right. As she poured the golden stream, she breathed on it and the gold turned red at the touch of her breath. It pooled in her palm and took form, like a ruby-red stone heart she held in her hand. When she was finished, she stared



at the stone she had created, and her hand started to tremble.

It was then, Tom dared near. She turned in her chair at his approach and looked up at him.

She smiled wide, genuine and pure.

It brought the Dark Lord to his knees to see it and at her feet he fell. Then Tom Riddle laid his head in Severina's lap as she gasped in awe,

"The Philosopher's Stone."



## Chapter 39

“You have a question, Mr. Potter, ” Dumbledore’s voice was tired and weak, “Please ask it.”

James hadn't looked him in the eye since his first lucid dream with Severina. James was angry. He felt in danger of being consumed by it whenever he had the misfortune of being in the same room with Albus Dumbledore.

Apparently, Dumbledore needed to tell him something... urgently.

James grit his teeth and shook his head but kept his eyes resolutely away. Dumbledore sighed, resigned and tired. Even though they sat in his living room, in his own home, James still felt as though he were about to be scolded by his Headmaster.

“I suppose, you are wanting to know why I needed to speak to you.” Dumbledore said, “I need you to be with me in the next battle with Voldemort.”

*Gladly*, James thought.

Dumbledore continued, “I do not expect to survive.”

*Good*, but James’ stomach twisted uncomfortably at the thought.

Again Dumbledore continued, “Voldemort can not be the one to kill me. It’ll need to be Severina.”

At that, James did look up but Dumbledore did not take up the opportunity.

“I’ve been too weakened to perform legilimency for sometime now, Mr. Potter.” His tone turned almost jovial and kindly, “You are however, easy enough to read without entering your mind.” He sighed, “I know you hate me for sending her to Voldemort.”

James’ nostrils flared and his rage shook his body, through his teeth he demanded to know, “Why did you?”

“Divination may not be an exact determination of the future, but I have a... friend who has proven to be particularly gifted at divination. I have friends the world over, in fact, talented in either divination or arithmancy and as many possible futures as they can decipher, a few things are constant. Either you, Mr. Potter, or your decedent will ultimately destroy Dark Lord Voldemort and Severina will betray him at his right hand, but not until she kills me. I was running out of time...” he trailed off.

“And what? Were we not falling into place fast enough?” James glared.

Dumbledore tilted his head a little, “In situations like these, time equals lives. The course on which we are now will save numerous lives.”

“Not yours though.” James said, almost coldly.

Dumbledore did not answer immediately, but eventually nodded, “Sometimes, sacrifices must be made for the greater good.”

“And those... sacrifices, are your decision, then? Why is the greater good, your burden to bear?”

Again Dumbledore seemed reluctant to answer. He merely stared down at his wand in his hand and



he twirled it back and forth between his fingers.

“I know you hate me James and I need Severina to hate me. It’ll be easier that way. I don’t know how you are doing it and to be honest... I can’t even be sure but... Are you able to communicate with her?”

James blinked and gave a curt nod.

“She needs to convince him to bring her to the next battle and she needs to be the one to kill me. Then after... I don’t know for sure what will happen. But I will leave you... something in my will...clues.”

James couldn’t help himself, “If it’s about his horcruxes, we already know.”

Dumbledore blinked a bit but didn’t seem overly shocked. “I haven’t yet discovered how to destroy them. I’ll send you the one I have. It is a ring. Its curse is killing me. Whatever you do. Don’t put it on.”

James nodded. Not feeling the need to explain, that he already knew that too. Dumbledore left shortly after that. He would tell Severina tonight, but she never seemed to remember anything he told her from one night to another. How was he supposed to convince her to get his Darkness to bring his prized pet to the next battle? Severina had her own plan anyway... She just needed more time.

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Severina closed her eyes and tried to focus on her intent. She breathed out. She hadn’t been able to focus properly all day. It was as if she were trying to remember something important that was outside her conscious thought. She wondered where her mind kept her subconscious thoughts... Where did her mind keep her dreams? Maybe an answer laid within...

“Severina?” His voiced called and when her eyes snapped open she caught a glimpse of the opened door as it snapped closed behind him.

Her eyes turned to him. He was smiling and holding an old tattered book. His interruption aggravated her and she snapped,

“My Lord, you demand of me the elixir of life and then interrupt me just as I am trying to finish!” she stood from her work station and busied herself with tidying up, angrily stacking her notes.

She flinched when his arm came around her waist. From the corner of her eye, she watched as he laid down his book, too worn to read the title. His emptied hand conjured a rose and he presented it to her.

Her chest twisted painfully at the sight and smell of the rose while being wrapped in strong arms. Unwittingly, she leaned into him.

“It can wait a while yet.” She felt the coldness of his fingers as he brushed her hair to the side, exposing her neck, ‘I’m not sure how much longer I can.’ Her hair rose and prickled against her neck as his words spoke across her skin.

Her hand darted out, not for the rose but for the book. She felt his chuckle against her back. He held her loosely, resting his chin on her shoulder as she opened it and fingered through the pages. She felt nauseous...



“These are,’ she cleared her throat, ‘binding ceremonies.”

“Yes, ” he lifted his head and pressed his lips to her temple, “I want you choose one. After I defeat Dumbledore and you’ve created the elixir, I’ll have total control of Wizarding Britain. I think our... wedding, would be the perfect celebration.”

She turned in his arms and he smiled down at her, calmer and more at peace than she had ever seen him before. She held the book between their chests.

“But this... You want me to... You want to...?”

He watched his fingers pass through her hair. Then his eyes returned to meet hers. He tested her mental walls out of curiosity, but she did not budge.

He sighed, “I would prefer a binding. Most bindings, however, will require us to wait until the ceremony to... consummate. If you’d prefer something less traditional, I won’t pretend that I’d be overly disappointed,” and his hands fell to her hips and squeezed gently.

Severina’s eyes snapped shut and a tear passed through as she pushed her thoughts of James away as they flooded to the forefront of her mind.

“No,” she gasped and he stopped his hands from traveling elsewhere.

“No?” he asked quiet and deadly.

She blinked and shook her head, “No, I agree. I think a binding would be best.”

His jaws flexed a little but he nodded. His smirk was sudden and cruel, “I hope you will consider page 63. It is my favorite by far.”

Severina arched her eyebrow and looked down at the book but he snatched it away swiftly.

“You were right, ” he said, “I have given you an important task, and I... I am distracting you. What stage are you on?” he asked as he set the book aside, with his palm resting on top to keep it closed off to her.

She huffed and turned to her work station, “The last steps. Set my intention and the incantation as I bottle it. Then, once I bottle it...”

He took her hand and brought it to his lips and kissed her fingers. Then set her palm against his heart.

“And what is your intention, Severina?”

She looked into his eyes and focused on his heartbeat in her hand. She nodded and breathed out, “To save you.”

He leaned in and kissed her cheek and said softly into her ear, “Then do it.”

He stepped back as Severina took up her wand and levitated the mixture over the prepared bottle. She spoke the incantation as the milky-white liquid filled its container. When it was full, she put the stopper in place and lifted the bottle as if to examine it. Then she pressed a kiss to the side of the bottle and milky substance shimmered and turned silver like liquid mercury.

His hand joined hers and cupped the bottle and her hand in his.



“The elixir of life,” he gasped and took it from her to look at it in wonder.

Severina’s eyes caught again on the book. She took it up and flipped to page 63— *The Purge of Past Lovers*. She didn’t notice how the Dark Lord turned from the elixir to watch her read the details of that particular binding. She nearly flung it at him when she read it.

He tisked at her scowl, “We needn’t kill him, only a small blood-sacrifice. A slit of the palm and any love between you two will vanish. Neither of you will remember... What I intend for us, Severina... For you and I. There is no room for your invisible boy. Even as a memory.”

Severina’s lips curled as she asked, “And what of your past lovers? How many will you purge? How much blood must you sacrifice?”

He was unmoved. “I have never loved.”

It wasn't really a surprise and yet it struck her. He never loved. He still didn't. How could he without a soul?

Severina calmed and the words poured from her mouth as if from her subconscious, “I want to be with you. Let me prove it. Let me fight beside you. Let me be at your right hand as you defeat Dumbledore and all your enemies. Then the very next night, we will consummate our future.” She said and held up the book, still opened to the *Purge of Past Lovers*.

His arms reached for her as a snake may have reached out for its prey. One arm wrapped her in a vice and molded her to his chest. The other wrapped his hand around the back of her neck and cupped the base of her head as she was forced to look up at him. He was breathing heavy and rapid, nostrils flared.

He looked as if he wished to speak but his jaw seemed locked in place. His body went ridged as his eyes scanned her face hungrily. When his eyes reached her lips, they froze.

Severina knew what it was like to be in the moments before a kiss. She knew what it felt like to have James pull her in and kiss her. She had been in this position so many times, her body acted almost instinctively and she leaned in. As soon as she did, he released her and stepped away.

“A kiss can bind the soul or...” he said under his breath, to himself in thought. He straightened himself and smirked, running his hand through his hair. He chuckled, “I’m pleased you agree with the binding. Perhaps you are right. It would be better to wait. No need to get carried away, now. We have the rest of our lives, after all.” He said with a wink. Then he turned to leave from the suddenly appearing door.

“And the next battle?” She called out to him.

He turned back to her from the open door, “You will be at my right side.” He smiled and bowed before he left, along with the door.



## Chapter 40

Regulus kept his eyes open as he watched the battle at Hogwarts. He hoped to all the gods that Sirius and his friends hadn't come along with Potter into this battle... and Lily. He hoped Lily wouldn't be as stupidly stubborn as the rest.

He had no choice. His parents dragged him into this hoping to let him witness the Dark Lord's triumphant victory. The Dark Lord was confident this would be the battle to end the war. His confidence bolstered his followers and the Death Eaters battled with relish tonight.

Regulus stayed close to his parents and tried not to get killed. When the Dark Lord called on the dark creatures, Regulus' blood ran cold. His eye caught those of Lucius Malfoy. An understanding passed between the two.

There was more than two sides to this fight, but it was hard to know the right moment to turn the tide. Neutral ground would be easier to negotiate with the light than with the dark, in some ways, but so little was certain.

Not without Severina.

She didn't even realize it, but she and Potter were the leading movement of the future. If only they could find her.

"What does that boy think he's doing?!" he heard his mother hiss and Regulus looked to where her eyes were turned.

Sirius, Remus, Peter and Lily were fighting a group of Death Eaters a little ways away, near the treeline of the Forbidden forest. Acromantulas crawled from the forest. The giant spiders startled the Death Eaters and the group of Gryffindors.

Sirius and his friends went into the forest while the majority of the Death Eaters ran away from it. Half a dozen acromantulas pursued his brother and his friends, dividing them up and driving Lily and Peter deeper into the forest while Sirius and Remus circle out towards the castle.

Regulus didn't think, he just ran. Ignoring his father's calling him back.

Peter seemed to shrink and disappear, but Regulus couldn't see how he had done it or where he had gone. All he knew was that Lily was alone.

Lily.

She had been nothing he had expected. She was sweet and kind, smart and brave. Losing Severina as a friend for a year had made Lily somehow even more all of those things. Not that he had known her before... But he had certainly never known someone so uncommonly kind before. She radiated it and Regulus had been nothing short of dazzled by it.

Then over the summer... While everyone in Potter's little group was busy comforting Potter, Regulus saw how Sev's kidnapping had tortured Lily. He offered her comfort when no one else seemed to even notice that she needed it. The first time she kissed him, he thought she was just seeking comfort, not that he complained. She tasted like strawberries.

"Reggie?" she had asked him, "What is this for you? This thing that is happening between us?"



Everything. It was everything to him because she had changed everything for him. Maybe he had already been turning from the Dark Lord out of fear, but she made it worth it. She gave him a reason and purpose, a hope for something better. She was his light while he was raised in darkness and now that he had tasted what life could be like... He didn't want to go back into the dark.

So he answered her, "You're my light, Lily. You're my reason to be brave. You're my hope, that when we come out of this darkness, there will be something good on the other side."

He reached her just as the giant spider pounced. He felt the fangs sink into his shoulder before the bright light of magic exploded from Lily's wand and flung the spider away into the trunk of a tree. Regulus fell to the ground and the creature shrieked in pain and skittered away further into the forest.

"Reggie!" Lily's voice sounded so strange. As if she were underwater, but they weren't underwater... His body felt too heavy to be in water.

Regulus tried to focus his eyes on her. He found the green of her eyes and was afraid to blink lest he lose sight of her eyes and fall into darkness. She cradled him in her lap and was trying to tear at his robes to get to the throbbing pain in his shoulder. Not that Regulus noticed... He just wanted to reach up and touch her cheek. He wanted to taste strawberries, one last time.

Her tears were falling on his face and then her lips followed them, kissing his face and begging him to stay with her.

But where would he go? If he left... If he were to close his eyes, would it be the light or the darkness which claimed him?

Her lips were no longer on his face and more than her voice was muffled, like there were voices drowning in his ears. The pain in his shoulder seared and he cried out in pain. Then his lips were being forced open and a liquid filled his mouth and he was forced to choke it down.

In only a moment, his eyes blinked into the clarity of reality. Two sets of hands helped him to sit up and into Lily's familiar arms he leaned and was held. He looked to his savior,

"Sev?"

Severina smirked at him, "You know, a spell might have been just as effective as your shoulder."

Regulus chuckled and turned to look at Lily, but Lily's grip was hard and her eyes on something in the forest.

"Are we quite done here?" came a cool and bored tone.

The Dark Lord leaned against a tree, looking on the scene as if their presence were a waste of his time.

Severina huffed and spoke to Lily, "Lily, I need you to tell me where Dumbledore is hiding."

Lily looked between Severina and the Dark Lord as if deciding how to answer.

"Lily, " Severina's voice warned. "It was Dumbledore who took me away, It was Dumbledore who attacked Reggie and I in the hall and sent me away. Then he abandoned me where he knew the Dark Lord would find me. So then, Lily, tell me where Dumbledore is."

Regulus and Lily barely processed what Sev just told them, but Reg felt sickened. Lily answered



her,

“He’s in the astronomy tower. He's waiting for..., ” her eyes turned to the Dark Lord, “him.”

The Dark Lord smirked, pushed himself off the tree and offered his hand to Severina. As he lifted her to her feet, he smiled down at her, huffed and rolled his eyes,

“Yes Dear, you were right. Stopping to ask for directions, saved loads of time.”



# Chapter 41

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

James waited under his cloak in the Astronomy Tower with Dumbledore for Voldemort... and Severina. James clutched his wand until his knuckles were sore.

It wasn't fair, the position they were in— he and Severina, but they had been put in the middle of two of the most powerful wizards of their time. Choices had been made for them. Sides had been picked for them. Now they had come to the pinnacle. Now they had come to the end. He hoped.

He listened for footsteps and his eyes turned to Dumbledore who stood with his back to the stairwell. He looked out across Hogwarts' grounds turned battled grounds. His eyes scanning the violence below with a tortured expression.

Footsteps never came.

A violent swirling of black smoke flew up the stairs and settled a few meters across from Dumbledore. Lord Voldemort appeared in the midst of the smoke and in his arms he held Severina.

What happened next, happened in a quick, fluid sequence that left everyone involved a little taken aback. Severina raised her wand and her spell hit Dumbledore in the back. It was a silent *expelliarmus*. Dumbledore's wand flew right into her hand.

Dumbledore spun to see who had won his wand and a look of relief passed his face. Voldemort too, turned in surprise to Severina and laughed as though pleased,

“Very good Severina!” he opened his hand out to her, “Now, give me his wand. It'll be the perfect end to this war to kill Dumbledore with his own wand.”

Severina's eyes went blank and with a swift slashing motion, she sent Voldemort flying into the side of the astronomy tower in a spray of blood. James flung off his cloak and cast,

“*Expecto Patronum*,” and his stag lit up the astronomy tower. James shouted, “Now!” and his silvery stag galloped out of the window and ran across Hogwarts, echoing James' battle cry .

Dumbledore watched it go and in amazement saw what affect it had on the battle below. Death Eaters were turning sides in the middle of a battle and disarming other Death Eaters. Voldemort's army was completely blindsided. Dark and Light fought back dark creatures and the creatures were retreating.

The tide of the war had turned.

“Nooo!” screamed Voldemort and blood spat from his mouth and sprayed his chin as he screamed at Severina.

James took his place by her side.

Severina had no answer for the betrayal on Voldemort's face. James had never seen such rage in a person's face before, such as he witnessed morph onto Voldemort's. Even his eyes seemed to glow red. He raised his wand, not at Severina, but at James. Severina deflected it with Dumbledore's wand with unnatural ease as James sent a counter curse. Voldemort deflected it with little effort.



As if his rage numbed his pain, Voldemort rose to his feet. Three against one. Severina, James and the wandless spells of Albus Dumbledore, fought Lord Voldemort in a barrage of spells.

The battle below was won, not by any side really, but by people who decided to find space between light and dark. Those below watched the flashes above and all seemed to hold their breath for an end.

Inside the tower, amidst the blasts of light, the Dark Lord Voldemort— Tom Riddle, fought for his life with the aggression and ferocity of any wounded cornered animal. His eyes glanced quickly out the window perhaps looking for hope that his war was being won outside of it. Just a glance, and the realization hit harder than any spell.

He had lost.

Another spell struck him at the same moment of his realization. It cut him. Another of Severina's slices across his ribs and he felt it as if she had cut his heart in two. The Dark Lord Voldemort fell, nearly unconscious onto the floor of the astronomy tower.

Severina disarmed him and as soon as she had his wand, she ran to him and went to her knees beside him. She reached for the chain around her neck and the vial that hung from the end. Just as she had pulled it out, Voldemort's eyes snapped open, his hand struck out and grabbed hold of her left wrist. The jewelled eyes of her ringed glowed and they were gone.

James rushed to the empty place where Severina had just been. He fell to his knees and pulled at his hair.

"No!" He screamed from his gut and then softer, "Not again."

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Severina leaned over the Dark Lord as he bled out into the soil of his garden where she had been once before, outside of the mansion house where she had spent her summer. She didn't let her change of location phase her. She put the Elixir of life to his lips. He drank weakly and some spilled from the corner of his mouth.

He seemed to be forcing his eyes open to focus on her. Then the pain forced his eyes shut and his back arched off the ground. He cried out and all Severina could do was watch, wait and wonder what would happen next.

"Why does it hurt? What's happening?" he groaned.

"I don't know. Where does it hurt? Is the pain in your wounds?"

His brow which was already pinched with pain furrowed more deeply as he considered his body.

"No," he answered as he realized where it hurt— in his soul. A location he would never forget, having felt it torn several times before. "No!" he growled.

He ground his teeth and seemed to fight against the pain.

"Is it...?" she could barely hope, "Is it your soul? Is it putting itself back together?"

His eyes snapped to her and he gasped his accusation, "You knew... this would happen? You did it on purpose!"



“Don’t fight it,” was all she said as she watched him struggle. She put her hand on his chest above his heart, “Stop fighting it.”

He hissed through his teeth and she might have heard a whimper. Then she sensed something flying through the air and she looked up. It was a silvery flame like a Patronus but so small, like a star in the sky and at first that's what she thought it was. She thought it was a shooting star, but it neared until it was right between them.

The flame hovered in front of his face. He was glaring at it with his teeth clenched. Her hand was still on his chest and her eyes fixated on the silver flame. She felt his hand seek hers and his fingers slip between hers. He squeezed and opened his mouth.

The flame darted in and Tom Riddle gasped it down. She could feel the magic... the energy-like heat beneath her hand, through his chest. His soul radiated a sort of light energy through him. Which grew warmer with every flame he swallowed.

Another flame came and another, five altogether. He groaned and whimpered pitifully every time one entered his body. When it was over, he was still holding her hand.

He sat up and Severina pressed the tip of Dumbledore’s wand into his throat. He didn't react. He merely looked her in the eyes.

“Severina...” he said tired and raw.

“Tom Riddle, ” was her answer.

His eyes widened, “You know my name.”

“I also know that if I were to kill you now, there would be nothing to hold you to this world.”

There was only peace in his eyes and a twinkle of amusement. His hand reached out and touched her cheek. Severina stiffened.

“Are sure about that?” and his thumb brushed across her cheek bone, “So Severina, you have my life in your hands then? You can give and take away as you please. How does it feel to have such power?”

Severina considered him. She stood, putting distance between them and keeping the wand on him.

“I can't let you live...” She watched him look up at her, waiting for her to tell him his fate. She became overcome with anger. “You didn't have to be like this! You have so much potential; you could have been so much more!” Severina bit her tongue and tried to stamp down her anger, but her body shook and her veins burned with her anger, “This isn't who you were meant to be.”

He rose to his feet and the wand followed him, but he paid it no mind. Even as he tried to step toward her and the tip of the wand pointed at his chest.

“Then, who was I meant to be?” he asked her softly.

“I don't know, ” she admitted. “I only know that, yes, the world needed change. Wizarding Britain needs change, but you went about it wrong. You brought violence and death. You brought chaos and fear. You were destructive when we needed to build. There has to be a better way for change than the way you did it... but worse, because of you we have actually lost ground. Because of you, instead of moving forward, our society is being flung backward.”



He chuckled as if she were being cute, “I didn't actually care about any of that. You assume the violence and destruction was a means to an end. It wasn't really. It was the point. It was the power and control. To have the power to give or take away life and at the larger scale of an entire country? There is no taste of power, greater,” and he stepped closer, causing the tip of the wand to press into his chest, “Can't you feel that power now? You have it in your hand as well.”

She did feel it. It was a sickening twisting in her gut, but the energy from it warmed her body and flooded her system with adrenaline.

“I can't let you live...” she repeated, “at least without some assurances. Even then, the world will need to believe you dead. An Unbreakable Vow that you will never intentionally or inadvertently harm another.”

“Inadvertently? Now you're just being unreasonable,” he huffed.

“I could kill you now? Or I suppose, you'll have to learn a life of piety and philanthropy.”

“I'd rather go to Azkaban.”

“That could also be arranged,” she sighed, feeling that they had reached their impasse.

“I'll make the vow under one condition— a kiss.” He said.

Severina sighed heavily and lowered the wand, “Tom, it won't work the way you think. My soul will not bind to yours. James is my soul mate and my soul will always belong to him.”

He was undeterred. He stepped closer until she could feel the warmth of his chest against hers. He pulled her in with a hand on her waist and one cupping her jaw. His eyes scanned her face and where he had always seemed to hesitate before, there was no hesitation now.

“Then mine will always belong to you,” he said.

Then his lips pressed to hers with reverence and hopeless longing. He tasted like milk and honey, and of the life the elixir gave to him. Severina was getting lost in the kiss, in the movement of his lips against hers and taste of the elixir on his tongue. She kept expecting him to pull away, but realized he might kiss her forever if he could. So it was Severina who had to pull away. Of course, it was her fate and her destiny to pull away from him.

“The Vow now, ” she rasped a little breathless.

He held out his hand and she gripped his forearm. She wrapped his magic with the vow and wondered if all of this had been too easy. Once the Unbreakable Vow was cast and sealed, he flicked his wrist and his wand flew from her into his hand. He smirked and she wondered why he had waited. Why had he bothered to negotiate with her at all?

“Do you think, Severina, that...” he paused to find his words, “Do think there is a life out there somewhere, where you chose me?”

“Tom...” Severina looked down at their hands and put her left in his. Of course there was. There was a lifetime where they were together, but it wasn't this one, “I need you to take the ring off.”

He lifted her hand and murmured the spell he had before. The ring loosened but before he removed it he pressed his lips to her knuckles.

“Are you sure I can't tempt you? Come with me. We could travel the world, discover magic long



forgotten, see sights that have not been witnessed in centuries. The world would be ours. In a different way than I had previously... planned, but it could still be ours to explore, learn and master. Knowledge would be our ambition and only death would satisfy our thirst for more knowledge.” He pulled her hand over his heart, “Come with me, Severina.”

She felt his heartbeat against her palm. She had healed his soul. She spared his life. Now all she wanted was to get back to hers, her heart, her soul, her life— James. She had done all she could for Tom Riddle in this life.

“Maybe in another life,” she answered and pulled her hand back. The ring came off in his grasp.

He looked down at the ring between his fingers and held it out between them.

“You don't have to wear it, but keep it? It's yours.”

Severina took the ring and stepped out of reach. With a *crack* of apparition, she was gone.

## Chapter End Notes

Since I'm so close to the end, I'm trying to just finish. Probably 1 more chapter and then the epilogue.

I know some of you were maybe hoping for a different ending, but I hope you're not too disappointed. I appreciate you all!



## Chapter 42

James felt everything go blank. He couldn't see or hear anything. Time stilled for him while it continued outside. They won, but he lost.

Adrenaline is a strange thing. One moment life is moving steadily and the next, time feels like an illusion of perception. James felt an eternity passed. He felt lifetimes had passed, after seeing Severina disappear before his eyes.

It hadn't been an eternity, however, only a few moments had passed of stunned silence before Dumbledore groaned in pain, pulled his blackened hand to his chest and doubled over.

James considered Dumbledore, the great manipulator. Nevertheless, James took pity on him and wrapped Dumbledore's good arm around his shoulders and bared his weight.

"Hold on, Headmaster, I'll get you to the Hospital wing," James told him.

"No," Dumbledore groaned, "My office... Please."

James supported him to the top of the stairs before he pulled out his wand and levitated him. Dumbledore didn't protest the entire way, but James could tell he was holding back groans of pain. He only spoke again once they had arrived to murmur the password,

"Peppermint sticks."

The spiral stairs carried them up. Once inside, James should have been more surprised by the presence of an old wizard- older even than Dumbledore if that was at all possible- standing near Dumbledore's desk, with his hands clasping something in front of him. As if he had been waiting for them.

"Set him down gently on rug, my son," the wizard told James.

He did and the old wizard knelt down slowly and revealed what was in his hands. He took the potion vial from his hand and put it to Dumbledore's lips. Dumbledore drank weakly the entire bottle. James' attention was fixated on Dumbledore as he watched life flood through him. There was no other way to explain it. It was as if an energy was permiittiating through him. Color filled his cheeks. His expression eased into peace. His breathing became even and natural. His blackened hand stretched and flexed, finding it's purpose again as the blackness was simply overtaken by life and turned again to a healthy flesh color.

It was the exlir of life.

James looked up at the ancient wizard who must be Nicholas Flamel. James looked between him and Dumbledore. Both old but looking healthy, and James remembered what Severina said about the elixir and age: "The elixir heals all ills, but it doesn't reverse aging. It can slow the aging process, but not stop it altogether. Because age isn't an illness. To age is to be in health. You wouldn't call a tree sick because it's grown. You see?" James did see. He saw age and health in Nicholas Flamel and in Dumbledore.

Dumbledore stood up on his own volition. He went to his desk and opened a drawer. Out he pulled a wand.

"I haven't used this one in... Oh, many year's, " he said with a nostalgic smile. Then his lip pursed,



“Things didn't go exactly as I had planned, but...” he looked to Flamel.

Flamel gave a nod, “It is better this way. It is better to end a war with love and healing. It is likely that as we speak, Lord Voldemort’s soul has been healed.”

“How do you know?” James asked.

Flamel smiled sadly as he looked at James and seemed to consider how to answer, “I am one who, either cursed or blessed, have some abilities of premonition. Which I have attempted to hone over the course of my life times. It is not always exact but often extremely close.”

“Then you know where Severina is?”

Dumbledore remained silent as Flamel sighed, “Severina is at a crossroads. Which means I have seen at least two possible futures,” but he seemed hesitant to continue.

James prompted him, feeling frustration grow with the vague subtleties older wizards seemed to use when communicating to someone younger, “What are Severina’s two futures?”

After a slightly prolonged blink, he answered, “If after Voldemort drinks the elixir she has made for him and his soul restores, she kills him so to save the world. Then she flees home, where your parents rush out to her with open arms. There she waits for you.”

James wanted to turn and run home right then, but his feet wouldn't move until he had asked, “And the second possible future?”

Flamel looked briefly down and then to Dumbledore, finally back to James, “In either case, Severina Snape and yourself have saved the Wizarding world and beyond.”

“Why are you reluctant to tell me?” James asked.

He sighed and answered, “If after Voldemort- or Tom Riddle, rather- drinks the elixir and becomes a whole soul... If Severina chooses not to kill him, she’ll make a deal with him. An Unbreakable Vow not to pursue power as he did, not to hurt another either intentionally or unintentionally. He’ll agree under a condition which she takes. The condition that she come away with him and find a new life together.”

James huffed and swallowed heavily. Then he turned towards the exit, “If you’ll excuse me. I must be getting home. Severina’s waiting for me.”

---

Severina appeared with an eager *crack* of magic at the Potter’s home— her home. She took in a breath and the sight of the house as she had last seen it, welled her with emotion. She started towards the door, but just before she reached it, the door swung open. Mr and Mrs Potter saw her and gasped,

“Severina!”

They opened their arms to her and Severina finally let her walls down. The first time in so long and she ran to them saying, “Mum! Dad!”

Even Trixie, the house-elf, clapped her hands and started weeping all over the place until finally she went away to fix everyone some tea. Mr. Potter was in the process of ushering his teary-eyed wife and future daughter in-law in the house when another *crack* sounded.



“Sev!?” Sirius’ practically bellowed.

Remus stared in shock which wore off as soon as Sirius started running. They wasted no time in wrapping her in their arms. It seemed everyone was reconvening after the battle and another crack and then another and Severina hardly heard how many as she was pulled into arms. Sirius, Remus, Lily, Peter and Regulus being dragged into it as well.

*Again with the group hugs* , Severina thought with a fond smile.

She didn't hear the next *crack* as much as she felt his presence. Everyone else must have felt it too because they all separated to see him. Relief like she could never have imagined washed over her at the very sight of him.

“James, ” she gasped.

He seemed to not believe his eyes, as he stood frozen and gazing at her. At his name, he snapped into reality and ran. She ran to meet him and didn't stop until she was in his arms and under his lips. They peppered each other with kisses, but never lingered long. Always wanting to pull back and see each other with their own eyes.

“You’re home, ” James breathed out with the relief she felt.

“I’m home,” Severina confirmed as she tucked herself against his chest, under his chin. James pulled the ring off his finger which he had kept for her and held it out to her. She wasted no time putting it back on her left ring-finger.

No one was eager to leave the happy reunion. Everyone kept mostly to the same areas and soaked in the relief of victory and of reunion. The adrenaline crash of the battle and the emotions of their victory and then their reunion, took its toll on everyone. Eventually, the Potter’s living room filled empty tea cups and sleeping wizards and witches, young and old.

James stayed awake, however, finally not needing a dream to be with Severina. She wasn't quite asleep yet, nodding off more and more. James stood and lifted her in his arms as silently as he could so not to wake any of the others. To have Severina’s weight in his arms and her arms around his shoulders, comforted him and grounded him in the reality of having her back.

He brought them to their room, and laid her on the bed.

“Sleep, Love,” he told her but as he climbed in with her she pulled him into a long kiss that sent away all thought of sleep.

She slipped her hands under his shirts and her hands moved across his stomach and chest. She gripped the hem off his shirt and once it reached his arms, he helped her remove it. Only briefly disrupting their lips to undress. He worked on undoing her robes which were unfamiliar to him, and he realized from where they must have come and from whom. They were nice robes and she looked beautiful in them. He didn’t let their origins deter him as he worked her open to him.

“Wait,” she muttered and moved to sit up and empty her pockets. She pulled out two wands used one to cast a silencing charm on the room. Then she placed them on the nightstand. James meant to return to her but something struck him. Two wands, both he recognized, as hers and Dumbledore’s. She took something else out too and it clinked on the wood— his ring.

“Severina?” He asked.

“Hmm?” she hummed in reply as she kissed his neck.



James wanted to throw away his questions, throw away the twisting in his stomach and simply lose himself in her, but he couldn't yet.

"What happened after he took you from the battle?"

Severina paused and pulled back to look at him.

"My ring brought me back to his home, to his garden. I gave him the elixir and watched as the pieces of his soul seemed to come out from nowhere. It looked like it hurt, like it caused him a great deal of pain to knit his soul back together."

*Her ring. His home where she had lived with him all summer.* He hadn't ever been jealous... just worried. Now, she was back and Nicholas Flamel's words pricked the back of his mind.

"After his soul... healed, then what happened?" James asked.

Severina looked away, "I was afraid I'd have to kill him. I was afraid that he would just go back to tearing his soul apart again, killing people, starting wars, and letting his ambition for power rule him. I was angry... I gave him an option. He made an Unbreakable Vow, that he would never intentionally or inadvertently harm another."

"And he did? Just like that? No conditions?" James asked.

Severina's eyes looked into his hard and James wasn't really sure he wanted to see, but he needed to... He fell into her eyes and into a garden outside a mansion house.

*"I'll make the vow under one condition. A kiss." Tom Riddle said, standing close to her and looking peaceful the way Dumbledore had after drinking the elixir.*

*Severina sighed heavily and lowered the wand, "Tom, it won't work the way you think. My soul will not bind to yours. James is my soul mate and my soul will always belong to him."*

*He stepped into her and pulled her in.*

*"Then mine will always belong to you," he said before he kissed her.*

James didn't stay to watch, he left her mind and searched her face.

"James..." she started.

"It's okay, Severina," he assured her with a brush of his fingers through her hair at her temples.

"How did you know there was a condition?" She asked.

"Apparently, Dumbledore is good friends with Nicholas Flamel. Dumbledore is fine by the way. He's all healed and Nicholas Flamel is apparently skilled at divination or something. He said you had two futures. Either you would kill Voldemort once his soul was whole and come back to me, or you would spare him by making him take an unbreakable vow but under the condition that you chose to go away with him."

Severina rolled her eyes and scoffed, "Divination," as if it was a dirty sock.

James chuckled and kissed her brow, "Sorry for the questions. I wouldn't have cared about the kiss... I mean I'm not happy about it but I'm glad he didn't force you to go with him. It was just a kiss right? I mean..."



Severina sighed, “James... I made him an Elixir of Life.” She looked up at him as if she expected him to understand the significance of that. When he just looked back questioning she continued, “The power of the Elixir... it comes from love, James. I was worried that I wouldn't be able to make it for him... but I did. I had to love him. I had to truly want him to be healed. And the kiss...”

James' expression pinched and he turned to sit on the edge of the bed with his head in his hands. He just needed a moment to think. He felt Severina's arms wrap around him.

She continued, “James when did you know for certain that we were soul mates? You've always been so certain and you've made me certain too, but there was a moment wasn't there? There was for me. It just a school girl crush and then it was more. There was a moment, don't you remember?”

James let out a deep breath and then looked over his shoulder to her eyes, “Of course I do. It was the moment we kissed. After we escaped the Shrieking Shack.” He touched her cheek, “After that, there was no going back.”

He leaned in and Severina met him in soft loving kiss. When she pulled away, she explained,

“Exactly. When two compatible souls kiss, they are bound to each other. Compatibility... you and I are compatible in a way that complimentary opposites are compatible. But... oh James... you and Lily were compatible too. In the way where likeness begets likeness. Had you continued to pursue Lily, it would have worked out. You both would have been soul bound as you and I are.”

James held up his hand for her to stop, “Lily's with Regulus and I'm with you.”

“I noticed that... they are opposites. Time will tell is they are soul mates, I suppose. We all make choices and they lead us to certain destiny points but a destiny isn't the end, just another choice to make.”

“And Riddle was your choice? Your destiny?” James asked, not without pain .

“Yes,” Severina answered reluctantly.

“Were you compatible,” James stated and his stomach clenched.

At that she paused a little, wondering why he wanted to talk about all this right now. But eventually she answered, “Yes. Not in opposites but similarities.”

James flexed his jaw and looked down at the floor, “I never kissed Lily. After you, I felt repelled by her.”

Severina sighed, “Yes but you were also still drawn in too, a little. It was the same for me.”

“What else happened between you too?”

“Nothing. Just the one kiss, I swear.”

James nodded, “Nothing. That's what you always tell me. You said he was trying to manipulate you into loving him so you'd make the elixir for him. That he wouldn't want to force anything on you in case it hurt his chances of you making it...”

Severina spoke slowly, confused, “Because his soul was unstable and he wasn't sure what my kiss would do to his soul... James... I've only just gotten back. I haven't told you...”



“Oh!” James bounced a bit on the bed, excited to show her the vial he pulled from the nightstand drawer, as if their conversation hadn't just been rather serious, “Dad made this. I felt like we could reach each other in our dreams. I’ve felt like that for a long time, like I could reach you even as I slept. So I had Dad make this potion to help me remember my dreams. So you see, we haven't actually been a part at all. There is so much to remind you of...”

Severina took the vial and examined it, “Incredible,” she whispered.

James chuckled at Severina’s expression. It was one he had missed, when she was completely focused on figuring out a potion. James turned back to her and plucked the vial from her hand. He placed it next to the wands.

Severina’s eyes followed it and remarked, “There is something weird about Dumbledore’s wand. I should probably get it back to him.”

James put his hand on her thigh and rubbed a gentle circle with his thumb, “He has another wand, he’ll be fine until we see him again. Can you forgive me for my jealousy? Can we start our ‘happily ever after’ now?”

Severina looked up at him and her shoulder gave a sigh of relief, “Of course, James,” tears clouded her eyes because finally she didn't need to keep them in all time, “All I want is our future together. Please James,” she said and started to kiss him, “I’ve missed you. It feels so long...”

James knew what she meant of course and smirked against her lips. If she could remember their dreams, it really hadn’t been so very long. But a dream wasn't the same as reality, no matter how realistic the dreams were...

He helped her peel off her robes and she helped him push off his pants. They reveled in their bare skin, finding the familiar texture of each other beneath their hands. It wasn’t an exploration like their first times together, but a rediscovery.

Every kiss was an “I love you.” Every moan and sigh, a reaffirmation. Every touch solidified that they were truly together, never to be parted again.



# Epilogue

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

### *The Essential Truth of Alchemy*

by Severina Potter

Dedicated to James Potter, whose bravery, love and devotion made all my ambitions possible and all my goals achievable.

A Foreword and a Warning:

I had many discussions with Nicholas Flamel before his death and he confided in me the greatest burden of the immortal is morality. To us the magicians, to whom all doors are open whether good or evil or in between, to us the border of existence is ethics.

Some muggle religions have a legend that explains this concept. The story of the first man and first woman and two trees. One tree gave fruit of eternal life and the other the knowledge of good and evil. When they ate of the fruit of the knowledge good and evil, God then took the tree of eternal life from them.

The moral of the story? Mortals are not to enjoy immortality without pure morality. So then, the philosopher's stone can not give immortality without the price of pure moral intent. Such continual purification of the soul is exhausting. It is not for the feint of heart, it is not for the overly ambitious and it is not for narcissist.

I caution you, I warn you, to purify a soul that resists the purification is fatal. I have seen it firsthand. Lord Voldemort drank of the Elixir of Life, but when the magic started to knit his soul back together he resisted. He succumbed to the pain of a severed soul and thus, the Dark Lord Voldemort was no more.

Nicholas Flamel had the gift of premonition. Generation after generation, century after century he bore the burden of trying to save the world from itself. I know of two dark wizards he helped stop from trampolining countless lives into the ground, in the name of ambition.

Is ambition wrong? No. Was Grindelwald's message without merit? Were Voldemort's? No, but ambition unchecked and fueled by selfish and self-serving motivation must find it's end in death.

One more note. While the burden of the philosopher's stone is a pure soul, the purifying essence is love. My soul loves it's mate and is loved in return. So then, alchemist you must truly, deeply and purely love. Love is the only way to bear the burden. It is the only salvation of purification.

Good luck, future alchemist, may you love more purely and bear the burden of morality better than your predecessors.

----

Tom Riddle shut the book with a soft smile. His Severina was quite the accomplished alchemist



and her books would always be his favorite.

“Harry!”

He heard her voice and looked up. She had grown into an elegance she carried with confidence. The sight of her made his chest stutter. She was beautiful.

Tom had been back in England for a little over a year, but previously he would come and go as he pleased. Whenever he came, he would find a way to find Severina.

He had a new name now and a new face. He wrote to her about his travels and shared with her all that he had learned. Postcards signed “wish you were here.” Sometimes she wrote back. They had become friends and on his side she was his best friend. He had never had that before. He owed her much, but could offer her little.

A life of piety and philanthropy proved to be an exercise of patience for Tom Riddle. Severina was right though, it easier when love is a motivation. He remembered Severina’s words he had just read, *“Love is the only way to bear the burden.”*

Tom decided to come back to England and to Hogwarts. He suspected that Dumbledore knew his true identity, but considering the Vow and the world believing him dead, there really was no point in rehashing the war. It wouldn't do anyone any good. Besides, Hogwarts needed a DADA professor and Tom knew how to break the curse on the position.

Also, someone needed to watch over Severina’s sons.

“Harry, how did you break your glasses again?” Severina scolded her eldest as she pulled out her wand and mended the crooked bridge of the boy’s glasses.

“Sorry, Mum,” the boy mumbled. He was every inch the image of his father. A fact that sent a pang through Tom. “I wanted to practice flying. Gryffindor’s having tryouts.”

She crossed her arms and scowled, “And what? Did you crash into a tree? Are you going to tryout as a bludger?”

The boy looked at his father. Father and son ran their fingers through their hair not realizing their synchronization. The father chuckled nervously at Severina,

“He didn't hit the tree, Love. I got to him first... only he ran into me.”

“You ran into me!” Harry protested.

James ruffled Harry’s hair and said with mock concern, “Oh no, Harry! You must have hit your head harder than I thought...”

Harry swatted his father’s hand away. Severina shook her head fondly and looked to her second son with an arched eyebrow. Her second son looked a perfect mixture of father and mother. He had much of his father’s features but he had obsidian eyes and straight black hair which he kept clean cut and neatly styled.

The younger boy merely smirked up at his mother and said, “I hadn't seen what happened. I was brushing up on my texts before school.”

Harry threw his arm around his brother, “Sadly, Mum, it's true.”



The younger brother pushed his older brother off of him, but Harry barely noticed, having caught sight of a tall redheaded boy and a girl with bushy hair. Harry ran off to his friends. The younger boy stayed to say goodbye to his parents and then to his uncles, aunts and cousins.

Tom watched a little while longer. The train started off. Severina, stood with her husband's arm around her waist, surrounded by her friends turned family and waved her sons goodbye as they rolled off to Hogwarts. He ached a little watching them all and wondered if he could have given her this. Tom's eyes caught the diamond snake on her right index finger. He smiled a little before he turned into the crowd and disappeared. He had to return to Hogwarts before the students arrived, after all.

---

James stood among his friends, with his arm looped around his wife. He had imagined this moment for years. Standing with the entire Marauders gang while they dropped off their children on the Hogwarts Express. Harry was the oldest but they had all been there last year to see him off.

This year their youngest son and Lily's and Reggie's oldest would be first years. Next year it would be Padfoot's and Moony's son's turn. Well... Moony didn't have his furry little problem anymore, Sev and Belby had figured out how to combine Sev's alchemy and the wolfsbane potion and created a cure for lycanthropy. That was old news now.

Wormtail's wife was a bit of a nag and didn't want kids, but Pete seemed happy enough. She wasn't all bad, Pete was just a bit slow on the uptake at times. Basically, the other Marauders passed the Wormtail-nagging off to his wife.

They waved the kids off and watched the train roll away. James glanced behind them. He never saw him, but he knew... he knew that every once in awhile, His-not-so-dark-anymore-ness would check up on them.

James held Severina a little tighter. She received another owl this morning. She never kept any of his letters a secret from him. James had read them all.

James wished the man would just accept an invitation to dinner, but he supposed, were their positions switched, it would be hard to watch Severina happy with someone else and their children running around. Maybe it was easier to watch from a distance.

Maybe Tom Riddle truly had loved Severina. He loved her enough to let her go, and let her be loved and happy.

"James?" Severina's voice called up to him.

He looked down at her and kissed her temple, "Yes, Dear?"

She chuckled, "Let's go home. I'm sure the girls are up from their nap and Grandma and Grandpa would probably appreciate if we don't tarry."

Their girls hadn't been a surprise, necessarily. Most people thought so because of the age difference between the boys. Four and two, the girls had to wait until their mother had developed a cure for Dragon Pox. The Elixir cured his parents of course but Severina was only one witch and there were not enough alchemists who could make it. So she found a way to cure it with a potion. Like the Potters before her, she added to the family coffers. Not even the Malfoy's could keep up with the Potters, which had apparently cause a bit of a rivalry between their Harry and Draco Malfoy.



James Potter smiled widely, showing his dimples and the ever boyish glint in his eyes. James felt at that moment how perfect his life was. He had great friends, great kids, his parents lived to see their grandchildren, and he had married his incredibly brilliant soulmate. He wouldn't change a thing.

"Okay, Love, let's go home."

---

Tom Fleamont Potter took his turn on the stool and felt the hat slip on his head.

*"Hmm." The Sorting Hat hummed in this head, "Bravery for sure. Intelligence, yes. Loyalty, certainly for the ones you love. Cunning when necessary. Ambitious with a passion Salazar himself would approve of. So much like your mother and I recall every mind I touch. She was a difficult decision indeed. So what will it be young Potter?"*

*"Do you mean you don't know? I thought you—"*

*"Oh, I do. I know just where to put you, but I am getting rather tired of people accusing me of being wrong."*

*"Would you have put my mother somewhere different?"*

The hat was silent for what seemed several minutes, but rather than answering his question the Sorting Hat announced loudly,

"Slytherin!"

Tom felt the hat being lifted off of him and he turned quickly to his brother at the Gryffindor table. Harry clapped and cheered with everyone else, but his smile looked a little sad.

Their cousin was next. Well, not really a first cousin. They were probably related on their fathers's sides but their mothers had been friends since they were children and were practically sisters.

Azalea Black's sorting seemed to take longer even than his. Everyone seemed to be watching and waiting. Well, everyone except the strange sensation that Tom felt someone was watching him. He thought it might be Harry, but Harry was watching Azalea, wondering if she'd be a Gryffindor like her mother or a Slytherin like her father. Not that children had to be like either of their parents... if anyone would be divergent, it'd be Azalea.

Tom looked up to the Professors's table and startled to find a single pair of eyes on him. The Professor sat next to Slughorn and was rather unremarkable at first glance. He'd be kind of wizard you would simply overlook if you passed him on the street or in the shops. Tom knew who he was of course— Professor Smith, the DADA professor.

Harry complained about him all the time. Said Smith was the strictest professor at Hogwarts. Professor Smith, however, saved Harry twice last year. Once when Harry had fallen from his broom when racing with Draco Malfoy. Smith took quite a lot of points from Gryffindor for the race. Then again Professor Smith saved Harry and his friends from Hagrid's pet three-headed dog. Harry said they were just wanting to see the dog but didn't know that it didn't like people other than Hagrid. It did like music apparently...

So Tom decided to not make an enemy of Professor Smith and gave him a slight cordial nod in recognition. The DADA Professor returned the nod and Tom was sure he saw the man smile almost proudly.



“Hufflepuff!” The Hat announced.

Azalea looked to Tom, then to Harry and they both smiled and clapped along, as she went to the Hufflepuff table. They had both seen that coming. Next year, Channing Lupin-Black would be sorted. Probably to Gryffindor like his fathers but Tom wouldn't be surprised if he ended up in Slytherin with him. Channing could be fiercely cunning when he put his mind to it.

As the sorting finished and the feast began, Tom felt sure that this was going to be a good year. He couldn't wait to write his Mum and Dad all about it.

## Chapter End Notes

THE END

Thank you so much for reading! I appreciate all the kudos and every single comment!

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